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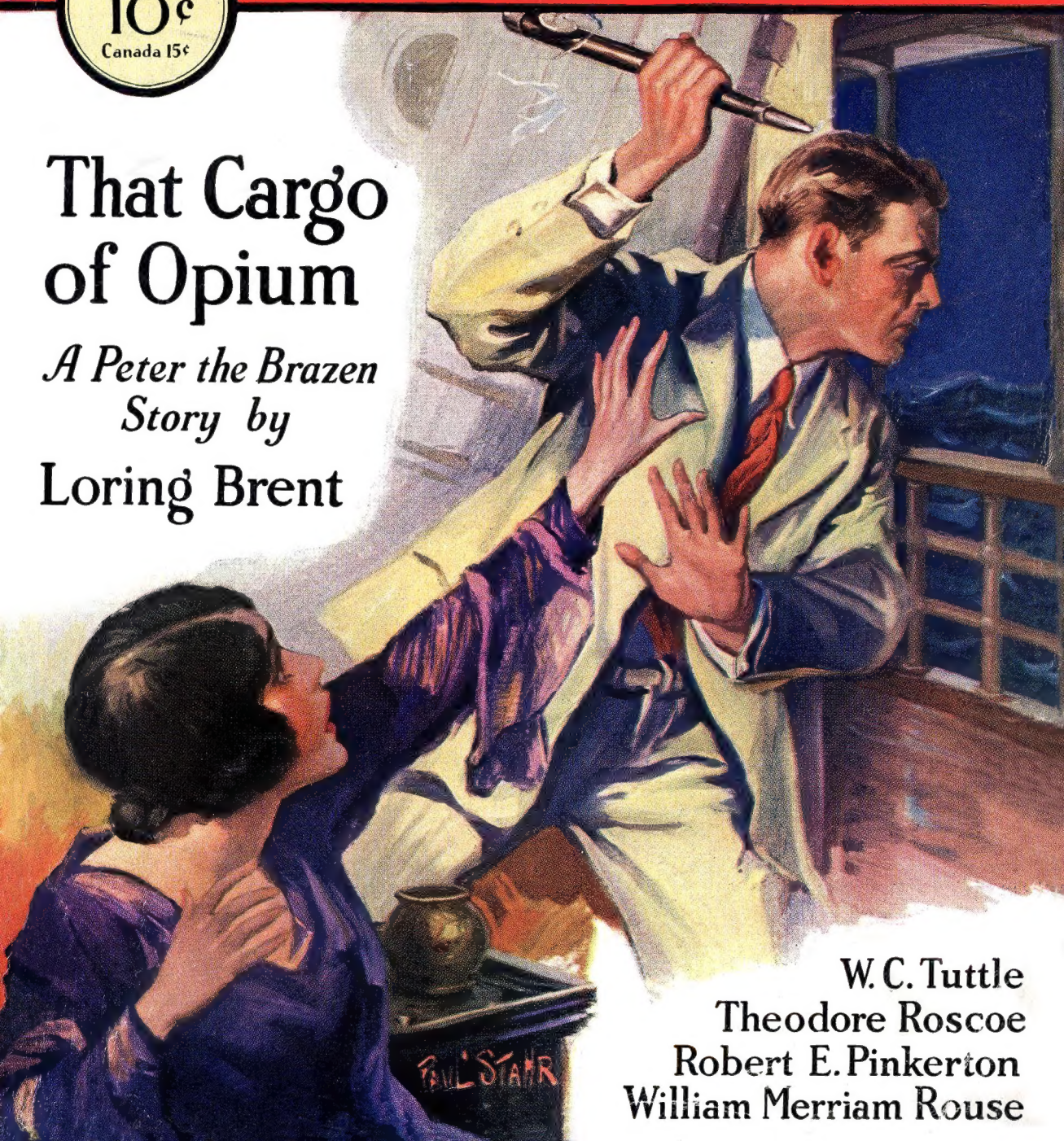
Loring Brent



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* * * * * * * *

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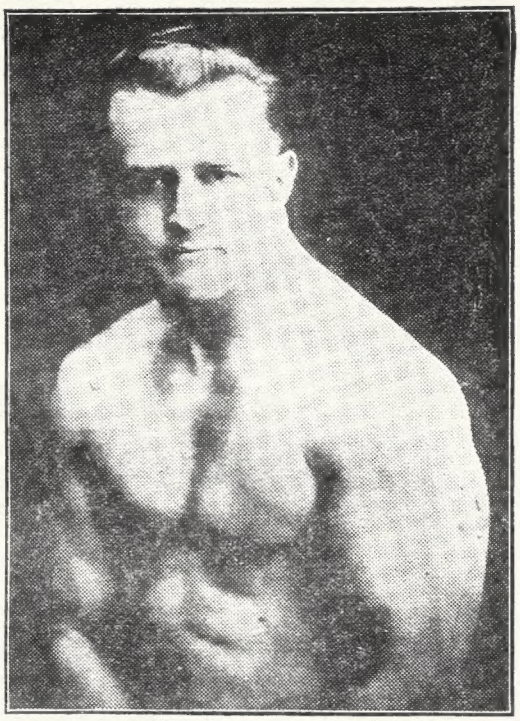

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ARGOSY
ON SALE EVERY WEDNESDAY

VOLUME 213 SATURDAY, JUNE 21, 1930 NUMBER 2

She blew a kiss toward receding Shanghai

That Cargo of Opium

Peter the Brazen was running away—from a thrill-seeking, adventure-crazy girl; but wherever he went in the China Seas, trouble clung to him like iron to a magnet

By LORING BRENT

Author of "The Man in the Jade Mask," "The Sapphire Smile," etc.

CHAPTER I.

TRAMP OF THE CHINA SEAS.

THE first rays of the rising sun struck down through the fog like javelins of gold. It was beginning to thin. The rolling billows of mist, as if mysteriously illuminated from the inside, glowed saffron to yellow; yellow to gold.

The modern city of Shanghai emerged dripping from the mist. The Whangpo-kiang, rolling down to the Yellow Sea in a gurgling brown tide, once more became visible. Ships at moorings and at anchor, brown junks

with bare masts, stood out against the pearly background, where Pootung Point lay, like ships of black jade carved upon a field of alabaster.

The City of Swatow, a frowzy, rusty-sided tramp—mute testimony to the deplorable lack of efficiency or good management betrayed by all native-owned ships—rode at her forward and after anchors. She might have been hauled only recently from the ooze of the sea bottom.

Seaweed hung down in long green beards from the hawse-holes out of which stood her anchor chains. Her bright work had become gray. Her white superstructure was slate. Rivet heads drooled rust down her shabby, battered sides.

A stem of smoke seemed to struggle with difficulty out of her skinny funnel, which was askew.

The term, "scum of the seas," took on realistic meaning when one glanced at the City of Swatow.

Seated in the bow of a *sampan* that was fishtailing out from the mouth of Soochow Creek, a young man gazed at her with eyes trained to estimate the worth of any ship at a glance. On his crisp lips was a faintly derisive smile mingled with a twirk of sadness. With such an expression, any man of the sea might have looked at the City of Swatow; for any man who loves the sea hates to see a ship sink so low.

His shrewd blue eyes pierced through her pitted iron hide, into the heart of her engine room—and saw there disorder and shameful neglect: steam leaking from rags wrapped around steam-line joints; caked grease and mud where mirror-like metal should have been, temporary patches of strap-iron that had become permanent.

Years ago no doubt a crack ship in the transatlantic service, the City of Swatow had been doomed to end her days, neglected and unloved, a frowzy old vagabond of the sea, creaking up and down the China coast.

The young man in the *sampan,* sitting astride his steamer trunk, glanced at the brown-red pile of masonry, across Soochow Creek beyond the northern end of the Bund, Shanghai's famous water front.

His faint smile went away, and only the twirk of sadness remained. For fully a minute he gazed back at the Astor Hotel with eyes glazed by dreams and speculation. Then he definitely shook his head, as if to shake the visions out, and squared his shoulders.

Unless he broke cleanly with Susan O'Gilvie—put her geographically well beyond reach—he was lost. She was too appealing, too provocative, and entirely too dangerous. And the City of Swatow, in her own good time, would carry him well beyond Susan's reach.

HE saw, with faint displeasure, the blackened strands of a wireless machine's antenna hanging slack between the masts. He would rather have been cut off from the world entirely. It would hurt, leaving Susan forever; but he wanted to make the break a clean one. He could hear Susan's voice, sweet and clear, like good metal struck upon sharply: "Peter, I think you're perfectly *cruel!*"

Peter Moore, veteran of more hair-raising adventures in China than he cared to think about, wanted his hair raised no more.

Grinning, he dropped a kiss onto the tips of his fingers and flicked it at the pile of brown-red masonry. Then he turned back again to face the future—and the City of Swatow.

She would touch at Foochow, Amoy, Swatow and Hongkong, picking up a

load here, dropping a load there. It would be a slow trip, but it would give him time to rest up from the recent adventures into which Susan O'Gilvie —whose thirst for danger and adventure nothing could quench — had plunged him.

The *sampan* swung in beside the rickety ship's ladder which ran up the City of Swatow's blistered side. Peter gave the deserted-looking tramp a hail.

"Hi—yah!" he yelled.

A China boy in a shabby, soiled white coat and faded blue pants eased out of a doorway. His eyes looked down at Peter blankly. Without a word, he vanished, to reappear presently with another man in tow. This one was presumably white. He wore the unpressed blue uniform with the tarnished brass buttons of a ship's officer.

He, too, scrutinized Peter Moore without enthusiasm. He placed his hands on the rail and called down, hoarsely, in coast pidgin:

"What thing wanchee, mister?"

"A passage to Hongkong."

The purser and supercargo, as Peter later learned he was, looked still more dubious.

"It's a long slow trip, mister."

"The slower the better," Peter answered, cheerfully.

"Well, I don't know, mister. We don't carry many passengers."

Another man appeared. That is to say, a door forward on the top deck opened and a man came out of it. He was tall, solidly built, and Chinese. In a deep-throated voice he bellowed:

"What's all the *bhobbery?*"

And the purser yelled: "Here's a guy who wants a passage to Hongkong, captain."

The captain now came to the rail of the boat deck and looked down suspiciously at Peter, who grinned back at him from the *sampan.*

"We're booked up," stated the captain.

"All right," Peter said. "I'll go as a deck passenger. Come down here, you, and hustle this trunk." This was addressed to the deck boy or steward, who had first appeared.

The China boy hesitated. He and the purser went into a huddle. Peter grew impatient. In river Chinese, he told his boatman, the *fokie,* to take an end of the trunk. Peter tossed the suitcase over the rail and onto the deck; picked up one end of the trunk. He and the *fokie* carried it up the ladder to the deck.

The big Chinese captain had, in the meantime, joined the purser and the deck boy. With suspicious, hostile eyes the trio stared at Peter. The audacious American grinned at the captain, flipped an airy salute at him, and said:

"When do we pull out?"

"As soon as the mate comes aboard with clearance papers. That's his *sampan* now." The captain's small black eyes were glinting with hostility. "What is your name?"

"Peter Moore—Schenectady, New York," Peter cheerfully answered. "Radio research division of the General Electric Company."

THE captain grunted. "I thought so. They used to call you *Ren-Beh-Tung*—Peter the Brazen—on this coast, a matter of five or six years ago. You are a trouble-maker. I do not care to take you to Hongkong on my ship."

"Captain," Peter said gravely, "for certain reasons, I must travel to Hongkong on this vessel."

The skipper solidly stood his

ground. "One of the Dollar Line ships is leaving for Hongkong this afternoon. She is faster, much more comfortable."

Peter's smile had hardened. There was trouble brewing on the City of Swatow. With senses delicately adjusted to trouble, he was made aware of it. It wouldn't have surprised him to learn that the big Chinese captain was planning to sink this old hulk for the insurance. Perhaps that was not what he detected in the air; but trouble of some kind was brewing. And he would rather chance trouble on the City of Swatow than the kind of trouble he was more than likely to encounter on the Dollar liner. It was not improbable that Susan O'Gilvie would be a passenger on the Dollar liner.

"I like slow ships," he said.

And the Chinese captain harshly answered: "I will not take you to Hongkong on this ship."

Peter planted his fists on his hips. He had been through this sort of thing before, in the old days.

Quietly he announced: "Captain, you and I know maritime law. If you put me off this ship, I'll libel you before you can get your anchors out of the mud. I'll tie you up in Shanghai law courts indefinitely. Where's my stateroom?"

The captain shrugged. Almost in so many words his attitude said: "Very well, I've warned you; you can take the consequences." Aloud, to the purser he ordered: "Give Mr. Moore a cabin."

So, a few minutes later, Peter Moore was being installed in one of the City of Swatow's cabins. Dust lay thickly upon its furniture. The linen on the bunk was damp and moldy. It smelled of Chinese rivers. But the cabin was commodious. Its big portholes would give Peter plenty of ventilation, and there was a door which opened conveniently on the small promenade deck. The food would be awful, but he was inured to awful food.

Realizing the voyage would be a long one, the young man unpacked his trunk and disposed its contents in the spacious wardrobe. Then he adjusted the porthole lights, drew curtains over them, turned down the bed, undressed, and put on his pyjamas.

He was tired. Because Susan O'Gilvie had involved herself with a crowd of cutthroat Chinese the night before, Peter had gone without sleep.

He got into bed now and, for a little while, lay in that pleasant hazy borderland between sleeping and waking. Dimly he heard the mooing of the City of Swatow's whistle, the deep rumbling of anchor chains. A little later, in his dreams, he heard the vibration of the ship and the rhythmic creaking of woodwork as the loose old engines took up their work.

ANOTHER sound penetrated to Peter's dreams—a voice, sweet and clear, like good metal struck upon sharply, was calling:

"Ship ahoy! Ahoy!"

The adventurer who had put all adventure forever behind him smiled in his slumber. He knew he was dreaming. And even in his dreams he had the canniness to reflect that it was far better, far safer, to deal with Susan in his dreams than with Susan in reality.

"Ahoy, there! I want to come aboard!"

The young man came swimming up from the depths of sleep with the horrifying premonition that it wasn't a dream, after all. He saw sunlight falling through the crack in the curtains

over one of the big portholes and lying in a golden puddle on the dusty green carpet.

He heard the creaking of the old woodwork, the faint persistent shudder which he knew was the voice of the old hull responding to the laboring of the antique engines.

Again the familiar clear golden voice:

"Lend me a hand with this luggage, will you? *Chop-chop!*"

Another voice, the deck boy's: "No can catchum, missee."

The golden voice rose sharp and indignant: "You'd better catchum—or when I catchum you, there'll be war!"

Peter groaned. He sat up, reached for a dressing gown and slippers; got into them and opened the door. The fog was gone. The sun had transformed the Whangpo into a swirling river of gold. A sweet breath of spring was in the air. The sky was a brilliant miraculous blue. It was the kind of morning that ordinarily would cause any man to rejoice.

Peter failed to rejoice. Silhouetted against the blue and gold of it, out on the river beyond the rail, was a battered old *sampan,* in the bows of which stood a slender girl. She was not more than five feet tall. Her eyes were not blue but deep violet. Her face was pale.

A close-fitting blue *béret* sat jauntily on the side of her small head. The folds of a gray squirrel coat were wrapped snugly about her. She might have been the season's loveliest, most popular débutante. Behind her, on the deck, was a small mountain of trunks.

There was a small wad of handkerchief in one gloved hand. The newcomer raised this to her eyes, dabbed at them. As Peter watched, she turned slowly to face the receding city of Shanghai. She was looking back at the Astor Hotel. She lifted her finger tips to her mouth, dropped a kiss upon them and blew the kiss in the direction of the red-brown pile.

Astonished, Peter watched this. He saw her shoulders rise and fall in a sigh. The girl turned about to face the ship again, and he noticed that her large, lovely eyes were misted with tears.

Suddenly it all became clear to Peter. Susan was giving him up. That is, she thought she was giving him up. She was making a beautiful gesture of renunciation. Susan probably believed he was back there, asleep, in his room in that red-brown pile of masonry. She was saying farewell to him forever!

CHAPTER II.

CONTRABAND OPIUM.

PETER withdrew into his stateroom and softly closed the door. The humor of the situation made him want to laugh, but he didn't even smile.

He refrained from smiling because the results were apt to be serious. He had been on the verge of falling for Susan ever since he had met her, a few weeks ago, on the crossing from San Francisco to Yokohama. Susan appealed to him more than any girl he had known; but he didn't choose to fall in love with Susan. Her craving for thrills had twice plunged him into serious trouble—and he wanted no more.

He heard her luggage coming aboard —trunk after trunk being dragged along the deck. He heard her imperious voice, demanding the best accommodations on board; the voice of the purser, protesting. She was evidently as unwelcome a passenger as was Peter

—and she was quite as determined to make the trip.

"This means," Peter reflected, "that I will be asking her to marry me before we reach Foochow. I could slip ashore at Woosung. But I won't. Maybe Fate has a hand in this."

He would not have been so amused if he could have foreseen what Fate had up her sleeve. He heard the tone of the purser's voice change from one of protest to one of conciliation. Evidently Susan had mentioned who she was. That name, with the millions behind it, would command respect and deference in any part of the world. Then Peter heard the name "Fung Low"—Mr. Fung Low, and some reference to the small Whango port of Woosung.

But Peter was too sleepy to put two and two together. He climbed back into his bunk, and was very promptly asleep, dreaming a very wild dream of himself and Susan conducting a camel caravan over the Goblyn Gobi in search of Kublai Khan's fabulous hidden treasure. This treasure was in a cave, guarded by bloodthirsty Tartars. It was necessary to mow down these Tartars with a sub-machine gun.

Peter heard the *tat-tat-tat-tat* of the machine gun, awoke momentarily to realize that what he had heard was the rapid-fire exhaust of some fast motor boat; and dozed off again.

Late in the afternoon he came fully awake. He lay in his bunk listening to the creaking of the woodwork and the persistent shudder of the City of Swatow's ancient hull.

As he was dressing, he heard the sharp tapping of high heels on the deck. He looked out the porthole and saw Susan walk past, smiling up at a tall, dark-skinned Chinese.

Peter said "H'm," very thoughtfully to himself and finished dressing. Now and then he smiled. Unless Susan had heard of his presence aboard, which was unlikely, he could imagine her surprise and delight at seeing him.

When Peter went out on deck, the sun was setting—an inflamed, evil-looking sun, like a grape squatting on the western skyline. The Yellow Sea, through which the City of Swatow slowly plowed, was as calm as an inland lake. Fishing junks and *sampans* were like painted ships on a painted sea.

Peter walked forward with his pulses racing. Susan O'Gilvie was leaning on the rail at the forward turn of the deck, looking down at the deck well. The hatch covers had been removed and Susan was gazing into the cargo hold.

THE tall Chinese with whom Peter had seen her was standing beside Susan—very close beside Susan—talking to her in a low voice. His clothes had obviously been made in London. He even wore a bowler, set on his head at the proper Piccadilly angle. His manner was assured, even proprietary.

It was also confidential. He was gesturing with free, graceful motions at the cargo hold and murmuring into Susan's ear. It seemed to be a receptive ear. The little enthusiast nodded her head eagerly and looked up with an eager smile into the tall man's face.

Peter distinctly heard the man say, "Fifty thousand—gold, Miss O'Gilvie?"

And Susan's answer, laughingly: "It still seems like a lot of money, Mr. Fung."

Then Peter was beside her; looking over the top of her head into the shiny black eyes of Mr. Fung. All pretense

of humor and politeness went out of Mr. Fung's eyes, and Peter quickly estimated the man: Southern Chinese, perhaps Cantonese or even Annamite; a smooth, polished rogue. He had met Mr. Fung's type before—not always to his advantage.

With a faint smile, Peter waited for Susan to acknowledge his presence. He was prepared for her squeal of delight.

For several seconds Susan took no heed of him. Then she became aware that Mr. Fung was staring with cold dislike at some one beside her, and she turned to find out who it might be.

Susan slowly turned. The eager smile inspired by Mr. Fung slowly left her lips as she stared up at Peter. Then the color slowly receded from her face. Her eyes widened. One hand flew up to her shoulder. She stared at Peter with the round mouth of astonishment.

"Peter!" she whispered. Then: "It can't be!" She quickly reached out and touched his cheek with her finger tips.

"Why!" she said, with amazement. "It's you! It really *is* you!"

"In the flesh," Peter nodded.

"But—but—why did you follow me?"

There was no sweetness in her voice or delight in her eyes. The scene was not progressing exactly as Peter had visualized it.

"I didn't follow you."

"Where," she demanded, "did you come aboard?"

"Shanghai."

"Then you did follow me! You followed my *sampan!*" Susan suddenly drew back from him. "Peter Moore, you make me furious!" she cried. "I'm perfectly capable of taking care of myself. I didn't ask you for your help. I think it's mighty presumptuous of you to force it on me—now!"

"I'm not forcing it on you," Peter said calmly. "I'm not even offering it."

"If you'll pardon me—" said the suave Mr. Fung.

Susan turned excitedly. "Yes. I'll join you in the smoke-room in a moment, Mr. Fung."

She turned back to Peter. Her eyes were narrow now. And they glittered with an emotion that could not be called, by any stretch of the imagination, delight.

In syllables as rapid as a machine gun burst she shot at him:

"Why did you follow me out to this ship?"

PETER leisurely lighted a cigarette. He flipped the match over the rail into the Yellow Sea, puffed several times and expelled deep lungfuls of smoke in the general direction of a fishing junk a mile away.

"I came aboard this venerable relic," he said, "a half hour before the anchors were weighed."

"You knew I was coming!"

"How," he calmly asked, "could I guess? I thought you were asleep in your little bed. I wrote you a farewell note. Did you get it?"

"I did," she snapped. "And that emerald scepter. You nearly frightened me out of my wits!"

She was referring to a priceless golden scepter, inset with emeralds, which Peter had secured during a fight in the native section of Shanghai the night before.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I thought you'd like it as a souvenir. If you don't want it, you can return it to Mr. K'ang—of the Green Circle."

"I did."

She was looking up at him, out of a very pale face with indignant eyes.

"I see," she said. "You were running away. Isn't that a scream? You were running away from me!"

But her voice and her expression did not indicate she found it very funny.

"I believe you," Susan went on, in the same coldly furious little voice. "You didn't follow me. You were running away from me. I'm glad. I'm terribly glad—because I'm running away from you, too! I'm still running."

She was on the verge of tears. Susan was, Peter reflected, far prettier when she was mad than when she wasn't.

"I suppose," she said, "you're booked for Hongkong."

"Yes, Susan."

"Well, so am I—and it's a long trip. And the thought of you and me being shut up on this little tub for two weeks is more than I can bear!"

"It needn't be," Peter said.

"I'm not going to speak to you during the entire trip!"

"I was about to suggest something of the kind," Peter agreed. "Ignore me."

"I hate you!"

"That's my misfortune."

"I came on this old tub," said Susan angrily, "to have some excitement—some fun. I'm going to have it. And I positively won't let you interfere with it!"

"I haven't the slightest intention of interfering. Have as much excitement as you like. Consider me erased. But if you should decide to sink the ship, will you drop me a note?"

The heiress to no-one-knew-how-many American millions looked up at him with undiminished fury.

"You know, I don't care what you think of me. Once I did. But not now. I'm absolutely washed up with you. I was going to slip away from Shanghai and—and forget you. Well, I have! I'm going adventuring on my own hook!"

"Is there really any adventure on this old hulk?"

"There is for me—and you're not to meddle with it!"

"I've given my promise, Susan. I won't meddle or annoy you. I will stay out of your way. Your majesty, I am eliminated!"

PETER made an exaggerated bow and added gravely: "I wonder if it concerns those crates down there."

Susan glanced from Peter Moore to the cargo hold. Then she looked sharply back at him.

"Those crates," she said steadily, "contain earthen jugs of ginger in syrup."

Peter lifted his eyebrows and slowly nodded as if with comprehension.

"Interesting stuff—ginger in syrup. It comes from Canton. Figure that out."

"What do you mean?"

"It doesn't seem to make sense," Peter answered. "Ginger comes from Canton. This ship is going to Hongkong, which is a stone's throw from Canton. If those crates of ginger came from Canton, as they must have, why are they going back to Canton? Maybe you can explain that."

"I can," said Susan. "They were consigned to an exporter in Shanghai. For some reason, he refused to accept them. They're going back to the consignor."

"That holds water," Peter admitted. "Now tell me why, if those crates contain ginger in syrup, it is necessary to open that hatch to ventilate them? Why do waterproof jugs, well-corked and sealed, require ventilation?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Susan protested.

"Let's go down there, and I'll explain," said Peter.

She started to refuse, then changed her mind. With a dangerous light in her eyes, Susan followed Peter down the iron stairway and into the deck well; through a manhole, down a steel ladder into the hold.

Beside one of the long, coffin-shaped crates Peter stopped. He was looking at the black lettering.

"Ginger in syrup," he commented. "It's the first time I knew that ginger came from Benares, India, to China. Queer, isn't it? Rather like shipping coals to Newcastle."

Susan said nothing. She was looking at him with narrow eyes. Her face was white. Even her lips were gray.

"Look!" said Peter.

With a quick gesture he seized one of the boards on the lid of the box. He gave a yank. The loose board came free with a shrieking of nails.

Within the box were what appeared at first glance to be carelessly made cannon balls. Rough round balls about six inches in diameter were packed in the crate in neat rows.

Peter lifted out one of the balls and gently shook it.

"This kind of ginger in syrup doesn't gurgle," he said. "Funny stuff, Susan, this Benares 'ginger.' There's enough in this one ball to last the most ginger-loving Chinaman about a year. Let's see. The outer layer is an inch thick. The ginger center weighs about four pounds. Refined, there will be about two pounds left.

"Interesting old stuff, this ginger, Susan. It comes out of poppy petals, and this is particularly fine ginger. The poppy is pricked, its juice is extracted, and when enough of it has been collected it is shipped in a wad to the factory at Ghazeepore. The workmen in the factory work the wad into these round balls. There's an inch layer of *lewah,* a kind of paste, used to make the poppy petals stick to the ball. Unless I'm mistaken, there are forty balls of Benares 'ginger' in this case. At least, it always used to be shipped that way."

THERE was a dangerous light in Susan's eyes.

"I don't think you're at all funny," she said. "What if it is opium? It's Benares opium—the best in the world. There's fifty cases of it in this cargo hold. I'm buying them!"

Her air was one of hostile defiance.

But Peter's air was one of amiable indifference. "Am I supposed to get excited because you've bought—or are buying—fifty cases of Benares opium?"

"I don't care what you think!"

"Susan," said Peter, "what I'm thinking isn't fit for utterance. I didn't know you were so fond of opium. At the rate of twenty pipes a day, you've got enough 'black smoke' here to last you—let's see—just about two thousand years. A long life and a merry one!"

"I don't think you're amusing," Susan stated. "I'm buying this opium because—because I understand!"

"Stop me if I seem inquisitive. But just what is it that you understand?"

"The villainous attempts of America and other countries to prevent the Chinese from having their opium! It's nothing but jealousy of England!"

"I see," said Peter.

"Opium," Susan went on angrily, "is not the dreadful poison that it is supposed to be. It is wonderful in

helping to cure malaria and tuberculosis and—and other sicknesses! And in China it is often used just as cocktails are used in America—or tea. There's nothing so terribly wrong about opium. Used in moderation, it is no worse than alcohol."

"Mr. Fung," Peter retorted coldly, "must be the world's most expert salesman."

"He is telling the truth! Like all Americans, you're simply prejudiced."

"You might amend that," Peter said, "to 'like all decent people.' Any one who tells you that opium is no more harmful than tea or cocktails is a damned liar. You ought to be spanked and sent to bed for talking such rot. What are you going to do with your cargo of opium—smuggle it into Macao?"

"I told you I would not let you interfere!"

"I won't interfere. Go as far as you like. But since you've taken up opium smuggling on an ethical basis, I'll give you some arguments on the other side."

"You're wasting your time."

"Did Mr. Fung happen to mention," Peter asked, "that the opium addicts of China spend upward of a third of their wages for the stuff?"

"I don't believe it. Statistics don't mean anything!"

"To a woman," Peter agreed. "Did Mr. Fung happen to mention what the final stage of opium addiction is like? The first two stages aren't so bad. But in the third stage an opium addict smokes to stop the pain he suffers if he doesn't smoke. Get that? The vicious circle. I'll quote the description that a Hongkong doctor once gave me of the last sufferings of an opium smoker. I can still remember it word for word:

"'The cry of conscience is drowned by a louder call—a call so loud and urgent that if it be not heard, and the stimulant supplied, reason will forsake her seat, and the cast-off slave of pleasure will find his sure and speedy end in the grave of his own vice!'"

Susan uttered a short, hard little laugh.

"Go on!" she cried. "You ought to be a missionary! Tell me more about opium!"

"I'LL give you a motion picture," Peter obliged. "In a Peking museum there are a series of drawings by a Chinese artist showing the various stages through which an opium victim passes. Want to hear about them?"

"Go on," she begged him angrily. "I adore talkies."

"We'll skip to the last stages," Peter said cheerfully, "when the opium smoker has a sallow complexion, sunken eyes with a dark ring around the lids, and bloodless lips. As he smokes more and more, his skin becomes waxlike, his eyes sink deeper and lose their luster, the eyelids and mouth become depressed and look as if some dark matter were deposited beneath the skin. Want to hear more?"

"Yes!" Susan snapped. "I think it is positively fascinating!"

"The lips of the smoker protrude and become more and more swollen from the frequent use of the large mouthpiece of the pipe. Ever see an opium pipe, Susan?"

"No, but I intend to."

"You probably intend to acquire the habit."

"Perhaps you'd stop me if you could!"

"No. I'm not interfering."

"Then what happens?"

"The opium smoker goes through terrific agony. He loses his appetite. He has awful mental depression. He loses all sense of right and wrong. All he thinks of is opium. All he can do is smoke. He must indulge almost constantly or he will go mad. Pretty picture, isn't it?"

"Perfectly marvelous! Do tell me more!"

"I'll quote Dr. Kolster again. He was quite lurid about it. He said: 'When the weary wretch retires to rest, the demon of his own creating pursues him still, and frightful dreams disturb his broken slumbers.' Want more, Susan? Shall I describe his death agonies?"

Susan was looking steadily into Peter's eyes. "No. You've told me enough. Your arguments aren't true. They're nothing but malicious propaganda. Opium when taken to excess is bad, perhaps. But it is seldom taken to excess. Smoking opium to excess is no worse than drinking to excess. Opium is, in China, just like cocktails in America or tea in England, or coffee in the Scandinavian countries. People—nice people—in China meet and smoke a few pipes just as you meet your friends in America and have a few cocktails. It is stimulating to the mind—it simply peps you up."

"Don't forget the celestial dreams," Peter said dryly.

"I won't," Susan snapped.

And Peter knew he was wasting his time. Susan O'Gilvie was looking for trouble. She wanted excitement, adventure, thrills. She'd find a few in opium. Peter tossed the ball of crude opium into the chest. A voice behind him demanded sharply:

"What are you doing here?"

The American looked slowly around. The fashionable Mr. Fung was standing near a stanchion with a short black pistol in one hand. The light of the waning afternoon struck ugly glints from it.

"Looking," Peter said calmly, "at your cargo of—ginger."

With the pistol bearing squarely on Peter's stomach, the tall, elegant Chinese circled about a pile of the chests and stood beside Susan and asked:

"Is this man annoying you?"

"No," the girl replied quickly.

"Get out of here," said Mr. Fung. "I don't know what you are doing aboard this ship, but I am advising you to start no trouble."

Peter smiled. He looked at Susan. She was pale, and she was staring at him defiantly.

She said in a husky voice:

"Let's have this perfectly understood. I don't want to have anything more to do with you—ever."

"That arrangement," Peter answered, "suits me perfectly."

CHAPTER III.

A RENDEZVOUS WITH PIRATES.

PETER returned, very thoughtfully, to the little promenade deck. He suspected that Susan's hostile attitude was the result largely of pique. It was quite all right for her to run away from him, because the girl thought she was falling in love and dreaded the consequences, but for Peter to pursue such a course was cruel, unjust—cowardly!

He was standing against the rail, outside his stateroom, smoking, when Susan and her fascinating Chinaman came up from the cargo hold. Susan had taken Mr. Fung's arm. Her small, lovely face was tilted up to his; her cheeks were pink. Mr. Fung's attitude,

it seemed to Peter, was too proprietary. Damn Mr. Fung!

They were excitedly discussing something in tones too low for Peter to hear. They passed. The murmur of their voices ceased.

The American snapped his cigarette angrily overboard. He didn't care where they went, what they did. He wished he had never met Susan O'Gilvie. She was nothing but a spoiled brat. Thank God, he was washed up with her!

Felt sandals whispered on the planking behind Peter. He whirled about. Lee, the deck steward, was standing there, arms folded on chest, his expression as inscrutable as that of a bronze Buddha.

And Peter barked: "What thing wanchee?"

Said Lee: "That sparky pidgin man talkee my him wanchee Mastă Moo' topside that sparky pidgin house. Can do?" Which meant, translated: "The wireless operator wants to know if you will come to the wireless house. Will you go?"

Peter thanked him curtly, angrily wondered what the City of Swatow's wireless man could want of him, and went aft to the tiny iron ladder that ran up the cabin wall to the boat deck.

He climbed this ladder and found that the wireless cabin was situated, as it generally was on China coasters, just abaft the wheelhouse and master's quarters.

A red-haired man whose face was startlingly familiar was standing in the doorway with headphones clamped over his ears. His snub-nose was freckled; his chin was pugnacious.

"Randy Nichols!" Peter said, almost explosively, and wished that he could have recalled the words. He knew what Randy Nichols was doing on this old tramp. How long ago had Randy Nichols been an idol of the American public, one of the greatest pitchers in one of the greatest leagues? Was it three, four—five? Peter didn't exactly recall. But he did recall the circumstances under which Nichols had vanished abruptly from the American sporting scene.

Randy had accepted—how much was it?—five thousand—ten thousand?—to "lay down" and lose the pennant for his team. Peter wasn't much interested in baseball. He did not even recall what team Randy had played on. He had never seen him pitch, but he would have recognized him anywhere in the world from published photographs.

The China coast swallowed up a great many men like Randy Nichols. Disgraced and humiliated, they slunk off to this remote coast where recognition by their fellows was most unlikely.

THE famous baseball pitcher was staring hard at Peter, but his grin was shy and friendly. He did not look like the kind of man who would have sold out.

As Peter crossed the deck, the wireless operator plucked the phones from his head and laid them on a table inside the door.

Peter was embarrassed. He had been cornered by men like Nichols before, and the experience had always been painful. They wanted to talk by the hour about the land from which they were exiled; they wanted to discuss "that mistake." It was always a mistake, whether it had been a bank robbery, murder or bigamy. They generally got tight and sobbed.

Peter inquired: "You asked to see me?"

The ex-pitcher nodded. "You spotted me right off, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Surprised to find me here, ain't you?"

"Nothing in China," said Peter, "surprises me."

The red-head lighted a cigarette and ejected twin quills of blue smoke from hairy nostrils.

"I ain't kickin'. This is a rotten old tub, but I'm satisfied. You're the first guy I've run into in two years who recognized me, and you wouldn't have seen me if I hadn't sent for you. You used to be a wireless operator, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Yeah. I've heard all about you. You punched brass in these waters five, six years ago, and you got into all kinds of hot water. Boy, you sure left a fancy reputation behind you on this lousy old coast! I hear that you quit the racket to go into the radio research department of the General Electric."

"I'm on my way to Hongkong," Peter satisfied his curiosity, "to look up a Chinese student by the name of Fong Toy who, I understand, has perfected a static eliminator that really works."

The green-blue eyes of the ex-pitcher seemed to gleam. He looked behind him and all around the deck, as if to satisfy himself that their conversation was not being overheard. In a cautious voice, he said:

"Whaddaya say we slip inside and shut this door? I want to have a talk with you, Mr. Moore."

Peter supposed that he would now hear the tragic story of Randy Nichols's famous double cross. But he was mistaken.

He went in, glanced at the antiquated wireless equipment, and seated himself in one of the two chairs which the small room contained. The red-head shut the door and disposed himself in the other chair. There was a feeling of tension in the room which Peter quickly sensed.

Randy Nichols, with the cigarette drooping from one corner of his generous mouth, began:

"Seems kinda funny that you should be travelin' to Hongkong on this lousy old tub when one of the classy Dollar Line boats was leavin' Shanghai for Hongkong this afternoon—and is due in Hongkong better than a week ahead of us."

"I wasn't in a hurry," Peter said, and wondered what was coming next.

"I wonder," the famous pitcher went on, "if you think I invited you up here to listen to my tale of woe—about the dirty deal I got when they kicked me out of the league, and what a tough break it is for a guy hammerin' brass on an old derelict like this. Well, I'm not."

PETER felt a little uncomfortable.

"I invited you up here," went on the blue-eyed red-head, "because—" Nichols hesitated. He seemed embarrassed. He looked uneasily about the cubicle, cleared his throat nervously and, with his tongue, deftly shifted the cigarette to the other corner of his mouth.

"—because," he finished hoarsely, "I thought you might be gonna start somethin'. I mean," he explained hastily, "I know your reputation. I know how you used to rise hell with these Chink crooks and all. What I mean, Mr. Moore, is that if you're here to start trouble—just count me in, will you?"

Peter grinned. "Did you ever hear the old saying about a dog with a bad

name?" he said. "Well, I'm that dog. Thanks for the compliment, but I'm not hell-raising any more. I am a peaceable business man."

"Yeah?" The red-head was skeptical.

"Yeah," said Peter firmly.

"You mean," Nichols inquired with disappointment, "this opium cargo we've got don't suggest any ideas to you?"

Peter's grin widened. "I'm not saying it doesn't suggest ideas. I'm saying I'm not going to put any of them to work."

Nichols shook his head sadly. "Well, that sure is tough. I was hopin', when I heard you was aboard, that you was gonna start somethin'. You better change your mind. Say! Come clean, will you? What are you doin' on this old tramp?"

"Traveling to Hongkong!"

Nichols discarded his cigarette and lighted another.

"How about this million-dollar baby?"

"You mean Miss O'Gilvie?"

"Sure. Her."

"What about her?"

"Well, I've been hearin' funny things about that dame. I got it pretty straight that she came over to the coast here to spend a few of her millions lookin' for thrills. I heard she teamed up with you on the way over, and you pulled her out of a couple of mean scrapes by the hair of her neck. I heard that; maybe it ain't so. But here's somethin' I do know. She's on board this old can to buy up that cargo of opium from Mr. Fung. I've got reasons to believe she's already paid for it. You're on here, ain't you, as a matter of fact, to steer her out of more trouble?"

Peter waited.

"Because if you are," Nichols concluded, "you have certainly sawed yourself off the toughest job of your career, Mr. Moore—and there ain't any 'ifs' sprinkled along through that, either! That cargo of opium is jinxed, hoodooed—it's got the Indian sign on it!"

"But I'm not," Peter said, "on board to help her."

The red-head looked at him owlishly. "Yeah? Now it's my turn to tell one. Maybe you don't know all the ins and outs about this load of hop. How are they gonna land it? Tell me that, will you? You're a smart feller. How're they gonna get that stuff ashore?"

Peter's answer was another grin.

"LOOK here," said the red-head. "Maybe you understand all this, maybe you don't. Fung owns the opium. He owns this ship. But do you know how long that cargo of hop has been on board here?"

"No."

"Goin' on three months! Get that? Three months! I wouldn't take that bunch of hop for a gift. What would I do with it? What's the million-dollar baby gonna do with it? What would you do with it? Listen!

"Just about three months ago, one dark and lousy night, we hove to about twenty miles off Hongkong. Out of the dark came another old tub. I'd seen her in Hongkong often. She was in the India run, see? All right. We hove to, and this old can, she comes alongside and transfers into our forward hold those fifty crates of crude opium. Three months ago! Keep that in mind, Mr. Moore."

"You couldn't land with it," Peter guessed.

"Mr. Moore, sayin' we couldn't

land it is like sayin' that a kick in the shin by a mule tickles! It's got to be the joke of the China coast, this load of Numbah One Pukka Benares opium! Finer than Malwa! Finer than Patna!

"Listen! We barged on into Hongkong harbor. Fung was aboard. He was gonna slip on up to Lintin, where the old opium smugglers landed the stuff, and put it ashore there. All arrangements were made. Don't I know? Didn't I make the arrangements myself over this bunch of haywire?" He tapped the radio set.

"And what happens when we start sneakin' into Hongkong? Searchlights from the fort play on us, searchlights from a dozen gunboats turn night into day. I tell you, it was a riot! No sooner do we drop the hook than out from shore comes a boatload so full of officers it was a wonder it didn't sink! And do they stay aboard of us day and night until we leave? You bet your life they do!

"So down the coast we go boomin', stoppin' at Soochow and Foochow and Swatow and Amoy; and are we welcomed everywhere we stop like visitin' royalty? We are! Everything but guns goin' off—and if we had made one funny move, they would of gone off!

"And what happens when we hit the end of the run—Shanghai? Nothin' but spies afloat and ashore, watching to see that we don't smuggle a ball of the stuff ashore. More spies than there was in the whole German army durin' the war! We got a destroyer escort down the river and out to sea, and we got a destroyer escort at every port we touched ever since."

Peter was beginning to laugh. And Randy Nichols, chuckling, proceeded with his story.

"Fung got nervouser and nervouser. Here he had gone and sunk maybe forty thousand gold in them fifty cases of hop—and how was he gonna get his money out? If he had declared it in the first place, okay. But he didn't declare it—and you know the British.

"Now, along comes another complication. You know and I know that opium is perishable stuff—the crude gum. Sea air and the river air don't do raw opium a bit of good. It gets moldy. It ought to get to the refinery as fast as it can. Now, moldy opium brings a low price. And this opium is gettin' moldier and moldier. Every day, its value drops. So what is poor Mr. Fung gonna do?"

"SUPPOSING," Peter suggested dryly, "we break down and cry about poor Mr. Fung!"

The red-head grinned. "And here's another, funnier complication, Mr. Moore. You know and I know that Chinese pirates aren't any more stamped out, just because there's a law against them, than thirst is in the United States of America, just because there's a prohibition law. Fifty cases of opium—Number One Benares opium—would make a nice haul for any Chino pirate. So any day, any night, we are apt to have a visit by pirates."

Peter had stopped smiling. "You mean a prearranged visit?"

Nichols nodded his red head vigorously. "Boy," he said, "you know your China coast, all right. Sure! And if you got aboard this boat to stay out of trouble, you sure did take the wrong boat!"

"What's the plan?" Peter asked sharply.

"Some of it I can tell you, and some of it I can only guess. But, first of all,

here is what I know. The million-dollar baby is buyin' the lot of hop from Fung. Maybe you know why. I don't. If you aren't helpin' her, what's she gonna do with it?"

Peter shrugged. "I've been wondering."

"Now, look. Is she a nice kid or is she a sap?"

"She's a nice kid," Peter said, "who needs a good old-fashioned licking."

"Well, she's gonna get it! And here's the dope. Some time to-night, unless I read the signs wrong, we're gonna run close by a coupla big junks. Just when we get abreast of 'em, that old tin teapot of an engine of ours is gonna sprain an ankle. While we're lyin' to, gettin' it fixed, the junks come up under the bow; the pirates come aboard—and *sayonara* goes the cargo of hop! Simple, sweet and pretty—huh?"

"Friends of Fung?"

"Friends, my eye! He fixed it up in Amoy with them throat-slitters. When I hear that engine lay down, I'm gonna buckle on my trusty gat and shoot the first yellow face that heaves my way. I take no chances. And now listen, Mr. Moore. Can you see all this go on and stand by, doin' nothin'?"

"I'm not interested," Peter replied firmly, "in that cargo of opium."

"But how about the girl friend—the million-dollar baby? She's plunked out fifty grand, hasn't she, for opium that Fung has already sold to somebody else—these 'pirates'? You can't let a poor innocent kid like that be skunked, can you?"

"That poor innocent kid," said Peter dryly, "wants to have a thrill. She would willingly pay fifty thousand to see Chinese pirates attack a merchant ship. She wants thrills. She wants danger, adventure, excitement. I'm not standing in her way."

"It ain't the money," the red-head argued; "it's the principle. A coupla good guys like us can't stand by and let a lousy Chino put something over on her. And I'm tellin' you that guy is bad—he's bad with women."

"Supposing," Peter said, "you go down and tell her that."

"She wouldn't listen to me."

"And she won't listen to me. A few minutes ago, she told me very emphatically to mind my own business. She said she was going into this opium deal with her eyes wide open, and that I was not to interfere."

RANDY NICHOLS nodded gloomily. "Yeah, I put her down for one of those haughty dames. Well, Mr. Moore, all I gotta say is this: If you should happen to change your mind and decide to mix into this—just let me know. If there's one thing I like, it's a fight. I like to throw things. I used to be pretty good at throwin'—things. I've heard a whole lot about the way you handle yourself in a fight, and I sure would like the experience of fightin' shoulder to shoulder with you once."

He looked at Peter with that strange, owlish expression. And Peter said:

"How does the crew stand on this opium shipment?"

"I was gonna mention that, Mr. Moore. That visit by the pirates ain't the only bit of excitement that's apt to happen on board this old hooker to-night. The crew is pretty restless."

Peter lighted a fresh cigarette.

"Where does the skipper stand?"

"I wish I knew. He's a bad boy. He's been in trouble with the authorities on and off ever since he got his

ticket. He used to be in the slave trade—and they caught him at that. He used to do some pearl poaching—and the Japs got him red-handed at that. He may have some scheme up his sleeve."

"How about the rest of the crew?"

"Well, for one thing, they don't trust these pirates. They know the pirates are comin' aboard to take the opium off. From what I've heard, the pirates have agreed not to come aft of that forward deck well. But supposin' they don't keep their word? Supposin' they decide to make a clean sweep of the ship? Supposin' Fung has got it rigged up for the pirates to polish us all off—and sink the old can? Why not? He's been wantin' to sink her for the insurance for a long time.

"And a lot of plots are bein' hatched among the crew to get the opium for themselves. The most dangerous of the lot is the first mate, a big, mean Chino by the name of Wang. Wang has been cookin' up a scheme of his own to grab off that bunch of hop. I know he's been arguin' about it with the deck hands and some of the black gang and the engine-room crew. Why ain't it a good idea? They grab the stuff themselves, throw Fung and maybe the skipper overboard, run this old can up on some beach and take the stuff ashore, divide it up and scatter. Why not? I tell you, Mr. Moore, there's trouble on board this ship—and it's gonna pop soon!"

Peter stood up. The wireless room was almost dark.

"Supposing you meet me in the smoke-room after dinner," he suggested. "I'm going to look things over."

The ex-pitcher said in a low, sibilant whisper: "*Psst!* Wang is lookin' in here through that after porthole! He'd stick a knife into you, that guy, as quick as he'd look at you."

Peter, with his hand on the door-knob, turned and looked at the port-hole. The face that was framed by the large disc of dirty glass was startling. Long and emaciated, it was more like a skull than a human face.

The yellow, pock-marked skin was stretched so tightly upon it that it glistened. There were dark rings on the eyelids. The eyes were sunken, as were the cheeks. Upper and lower lips were swollen and protruding.

Peter had seen enough opium victims to realize promptly that Wang, the first mate, was a very dangerous specimen.

In Wang's eyes there was no light. Like the eyes of a dead man, they were without lustre. And in the expression of his pock-marked face was the latent madness of his kind.

Peter did not require Randy Nichols's warning to realize that Wang was peculiarly interested in that cargo of opium.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW THRILL FOR SUSAN.

NIGHT had fallen over the Yellow Sea. Deck lights were burning greasily when Peter descended the iron ladder at the after end of the boat deck and made his way forward. A long, oily swell was rolling up from the southeast, and, in the afterglow, blue-black clouds massed on the south-eastern horizon indicated that a gale might be on its way.

The hush that had fallen over the sea made Peter uneasy. And the state of affairs on board the City of Swatow worried him. Opium had always been associated with violence, bloodshed.

Fifty cases of Number One Benares! To any Chinese in the crew, one of those cases represented a fortune—more money than he could earn in seven years! A dangerous cargo, that opium!

Peter circled the deck. On his second lap, as he passed an open porthole, he detected the acrid, pungent odor of opium. He thought at first that it was in his imagination, but a second sniff assured him that it was in the air.

He returned to the porthole and glanced in. And the tableau that greeted him caused Peter to gasp.

Mr. Fung was squatted cross-legged on the floor of a stateroom with an opum pipe in one hand. On the floor beside him were one of the familiar flat tins of refined opium, a spirit lamp and a brass tray.

In Mr. Fung's right hand was a length of wire. This he dipped into the tin. Extracting a small amount of opium from the brownish mass he quickly held it over the blue flame of the spirit lamp, slowly turning it and pressing it from time to time against the flat bowl of the pipe. He turned the little brown lump over and over, carefully working it on the end of the wire until it was reduced to a plastic state. The lump, as Mr. Fung continued to heat and work it, swelled up and began to sizzle.

Suddenly Mr. Fung inserted the little sizzling wad into the pipe. He pressed down, twirling the wire, until the opium adhered to the walls of the pipe. In a nervous voice he said clearly:

"Now, Miss O'Gilvie—quickly!"

He handed up the pipe. Peter came nearer the porthole and stared. It was his first intimation that Mr. Fung was not alone. Now he saw Susan. Bright of eyes and pink of cheek, she sat on a low stool to the left of the Chinese.

She reached down quickly, seized the pipe, placed the large bit of it between her lips, held the bowl into the spirit flame which Mr. Fung raised conveniently for her—and inhaled.

Three puffs. Peter counted them. Always three. The pale, thick, blue-gray smoke spouted from Susan's lips. She began to cough. In a husky little voice she said: "It tickles."

Mr. Fung ran insolent eyes up to her face and answered: "One more."

"But aren't two enough?"

"One more," Mr. Fung repeated.

"But won't it make me sick?"

"It will make of earth heaven."

Peter swallowed with difficulty. He had promised not to interfere; to mind his own business and let Susan go her merry way after thrills and new adventures. He forgot his promise.

HE yanked at the handle of the stateroom door. It was locked.

Backing across the deck, Peter paused and charged the door with his shoulder down and struck it with a splintering crash. Rotten old lock and hinges gave way, all but the top hinge. The door hung askew, dangling from that hinge. Peter went well into the room by the momentum of his charge.

Mr. Fung sprang up with the pipe in his hand. He lifted it with the apparent intention of using it as a weapon. Peter struck him across the face with the back of his fist. The Chinese went sprawling into a corner. There, reclining on shoulders, elbows and one hip, he glared up at the intruder.

Peter picked up the pipe, the spirit lamp and the tin of opium and hurled them, one at a time, out the window.

Susan had sprung up. With her feverishly bright eyes and her flushed cheeks, she looked wild.

"I told you," she said thickly, "to let me alone."

And Peter, with fists at sides, chest heaving, answered: "Yes, Susan. I know. But a man has to draw the line somewhere. Get out of here."

"I won't!"

He seized her by the shoulders, spun her about and pushed her out the door. Then he linked her arm forcibly with his and propelled her along the deck.

Susan didn't want to go for a walk. Susan was so mad she cried. And the fumes of opium on her breath were so strong that Peter felt a little sick.

He was furious. So was Susan. She tried to yank her arm away, but Peter held on. So, arm in arm, they encircled the deck.

"Take deep breaths," said Peter.

"You make me furious," Susan stormed. "You're acting as if I'm tight. I'm not tight. I feel wonderful."

"I hate the smell of that stuff. It may be cocktails to you, but it's poison to me."

"Lend me your handkerchief."

Peter gave her a handkerchief. She wept into it. She hated him. All he did was spoil her fun. Sobbing, she permitted him to walk her around the deck a second time.

"You're absolutely wrong," she said presently. She stumbled over her feet and would have fallen if Peter had not quickly jerked her up.

"Everything looks so smooth and shiny," Susan said. "You're absolutely wrong," she repeated. "It's wonderful. It isn't at all like cocktails. It's perfectly fascinating. I feel as if I were floating. My head's so clear. And I think so quickly. I never thought so clearly or quickly before. Peter, haven't you ever tried it?"

"Oh, my God!" Peter said.

"Oh, don't be such a damned missionary! Why! I can understand things I never dreamed I'd understand. I know what life's about."

"What's it about?"

"It's wonderful. One thing I can see more clearly than anything else. That's you."

"Oh, yes?"

"Yes. You're a terrible person. You're an awful person. You're a dragon dressed up as a man."

"Breathing fire and everything," Peter supplemented.

"But you've been awfully sweet to me, Peter. Too sweet."

"Yes," Peter agreed.

"THAT'S the trouble. You're too attractive. You're just too damned attractive. That's the trouble. If you weren't so attractive, I wouldn't be crazy about you. But I am. That's what's the matter. I'm crazy about you."

"Susan, please shut up."

"I won't shut up. If you knew how clearly I could see everything!" Susan began to sob again. "That's the trouble. But I can see a way around everything. I can do anything. So I'm going to hate you. I do. I think you're poisonous. There! That's settled."

"Would you mind," Peter groaned, "taking deep breaths of this nice fresh air?"

"Of course I wouldn't mind, darling. I am absolutely putty in your hands. That's the trouble with us women. We're putty in the hands of the men we fall for. But I haven't fallen for you. I loathe you."

"Yes," said Peter.

"When we get to Hongkong, we are going to flip a coin to see which goes north and which goes south. We will part—and never see each other again." Her sobs broke out afresh.

"You're breaking my heart," she said. "You're the only man I ever met I've been crazy about—and you don't see me for dust. Peter! Isn't it a glorious night? Look at those stars!"

"There aren't any stars," Peter contradicted. "The sky is overcast. It's getting ready to blow."

The girl vigorously disagreed. There were stars, she insisted. She flung out her arms and lifted her face to the clouds.

"Life is glorious!"

They had reached the forward turn of the deck again, and in the darkness of the well Peter heard the wheezing and clanking of a leaky old donkey engine. Then a lantern appeared. A dim and shadowy figure was unlashing one of the cargo booms.

As Susan leaned against him and wept at the sheer beauty of existence, Peter glowered down into the deck well. Another lantern appeared and flitted about like a firefly. There were men in the cargo hold. Deck hands.

What were they up to? Was one of the schemes Randy Nichols had mentioned already afoot?

Then Peter saw, for a fleeting moment, the long, aristocratic face of Mr. Fung. What was going on down there?

The donkey engine wheezed and clanked. Peter saw a steel cable, coiling and writhing, drop like the head of a snake into the hold. A moment later, one of the long cases of Benares opium came floating up through the hatch to be deposited on the forepeak.

To the clanking and wheezing of the old deck engine, other cases magically floated up to join the first one.

And Susan suddenly took cognizance of it. She seized Peter's arm and gasped: "Peter! Peter! What are they doing with my opium?"

"Is it your opium?"

"It is!"

"Stop payment on the check you gave Fung, if he double-crosses you. That's easy."

"But I paid him in gold! I gave him a check this morning in Shanghai. He cashed it while we were going down the river. Then he followed us in a fast motor boat and came aboard at Woosung!"

"How much?"

"Fifty thousand. Do something about it! What is he doing with my opium?"

Peter shrugged. He wondered what Susan had been like as a little girl. What she had asked for, she had got.

HUSKILY, Susan cried out: "Mr. Fung, what are you doing with my opium?"

The wheezing and rattling of the old donkey engine answered her.

Peter inquired: "Susan, what were you going to do with it?"

"I am going to smuggle it ashore at Canton! Mr. Fung said he'd help me!"

"I'm afraid," said Peter, "that you'd better charge that fifty thousand off to experience."

"But I won't be swindled!" Her hand began to tremble. She whispered: "Peter, I feel funny. Everything's getting shinier and shinier. It's like glass. You face is like bronze. It's all shiny."

Peter groaned. Why did this otherwise perfect girl have this terrific craving for experiment?

"Peter! Hang onto me. Don't let me slide. I'm going down and down. Oh, gee, Peter; this is horrible! I didn't know it was like this. I'm passing out. Take care of me, Peter. Promise me you'll take care of me!"

"I'll take care of you," said Peter.

She sagged heavily and limply

against him. In the glow of a deck light overhead, her face was gray, her lips parted and moist. Her eyes, half shut, seemed to swim.

Susan was all dead weight. Peter picked her up, with an arm under her knees, another arm under her neck. Her head rolled against his chest.

Peter strode aft. He didn't know where her stateroom was. Lee, the deck steward, supplied him with the information. Stateroom twenty-two. It was around on the port side.

Peter carried her into the room, arranged her on the bunk, pulled up a light blanket under her chin, opened the ports, turned out the light and went out. He shut the door and locked it, putting the key in his pocket.

A brazen uproar behind him as he started aft made Peter jump, but it was only a dining room boy beating the first strokes of warning for dinner on a brass cymbal.

Peter decided that he needed a drink. He'd have the drink, then go to his stateroom for his revolver. Unless he was mistaken, he would need a revolver to-night.

The smoke-room, when Peter entered it, was empty. The bar, a tiny square room beyond a half-door at the far side, was open. The bar steward was polishing glasses.

Peter lighted a cigarette and called to him: "Pay my one dry Martini. Can do?"

And the bar boy answered: "Can do, masta."

Peter smoked, occupied himself with his problems, and waited. He heard the bar boy cracking ice. Behind Peter was an open porthole. A draft of warm air floated about his shoulders.

The feeling grew upon Peter that some one out there on deck was looking in at him. A little icy something raced down his spine. He did not like the feel of things. It was like sitting on a load of dynamite that might decide at any moment to blow him to kingdom come.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

Giant Hailstones

DURING the past one hundred years there have been reliable reports of immense hailstones falling in various parts of the globe. In the year 1829, at Cazoria, Spain, during a severe thunderstorm, blocks of solid ice fell; the heaviest of these turned the scales at a trifle over four pounds. At Cette, France, in 1844 the roofs of houses were pounded in, and so great was the weight of accumulated ice on ships in the harbor that some of them were actually sunk. In 1874 a terrific hailstorm visited Natal, where the stones even tore their way through galvanized iron roofs! In this instance the stones were not large individually, but came hurtling to earth frozen together in great gobby masses.

The largest hailstones recorded in the present century fell during a storm in Maryland in 1915. They were about the size of tennis balls and caused an immense amount of damage to property and injury to human beings and domestic animals.

William David Belbeck.

By the Sword

Back from the Mexican War, Noël Potter thought he was at home in his native Adirondacks; but he found them dark with mystery and brooding threat

"Noël, this is Mag Botts"

Novelette—Complete

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

Author of "Gold," "The Hunted," etc.

CHAPTER I.

ROUGH WELCOME.

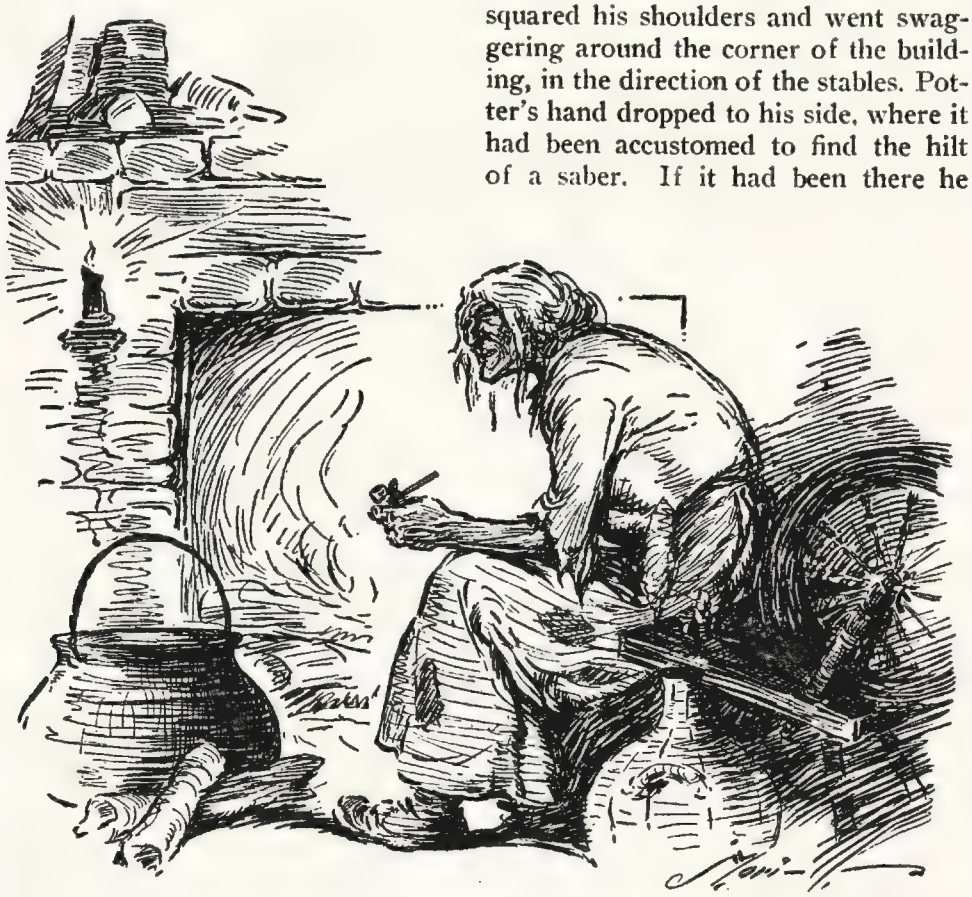
FOR Noël Potter, returning to his native Adirondacks, there was warning in the silence that fell upon the loafers in front of Sibley's Tavern. He drew rein at the horse-block and looked them over with a clear, blue gaze. Noël had hobnobbed often enough with death by steel and musket ball under Scott in Mexico to feel danger in the silent, black-browed scrutiny of the tall fellow who stood whittling by the door.

Only one of the half dozen men there regarded Potter without rancor. An enormous, powerful-looking man with a clubfoot had turned a mild eye upon the horseman. The healthy pink flesh of his face seemed made for chuckles; his cropped bullet head had an honest look and the linsey-woolsey shirt which hung open halfway down his chest was clean.

Moreover, he sat straight up on his bench in a self-respecting, soldierly fashion.

Beside him, cross-legged on the ground, was a man with a black mask

covering nearly all of his face. Below the cloth showed a scrap of chin stained by powder burns. It needed no great imagination to guess his story. He had leaned forward, and at the sound of creaking saddle leather as Potter dismounted he held out a rusty tin cup.



"Help the blind!" he said, in a husky whisper.

Now Potter saw that there was a deep scar in the man's neck, as though from bullet or bayonet thrust. This was no new sight to him. There had been fighting over half of Europe these past few years, and but lately to the south in Mexico. Noël Potter had done his share of it, and he was as quick to sympathy as he was to blows. He took a silver dollar from the pocket of his pantaloons and dropped it ringing into the cup.

"*Vaya con Dios, soldado!*" he said gently. Then he turned deliberately upon the scowling giant by the door. But before he could speak, the fellow squared his shoulders and went swaggering around the corner of the building, in the direction of the stables. Potter's hand dropped to his side, where it had been accustomed to find the hilt of a saber. If it had been there he would have laid the flat of it over that insolent head.

Smoldering inwardly Noël considered the tavern; a long, rambling structure lying broadside to the highway. It looked as though it had not been painted since the War of 1812, with the British; certainly it had known no repairs since Potter had seen it last, a matter of ten years ago. The bal-

conies along the front were sagging; the dormered roof had begun to lose its shingles.

But ten years ago there had been a hostler instantly available for any traveler, by chaise or horseback. Two or three men would have scrambled for the privilege of holding a Potter's mount. His fists clenched. Thunder, his big black horse, would stand; but Noël was not going in like a pack peddler to make himself known. He filled his lungs and bellowed in his drill-ground voice.

"Landlord! Come out here!"

ORLA SIBLEY still had the tavern. Potter would have known him anywhere, although a decade had added a little round stomach to the man and stooped his shoulders. Orla rubbed his hands, as always, and offered his treacle smile as he came at a dog trot from the cool dimness of the bar. He stood teetering and smiling up at Potter.

"If it ain't Mr. Noël! Come home after all this time at the wars!"

"Hell's bells!" roared Potter. "You must have seen me ride up! Haven't you got a hostler? Your voice is weak as gruel, Orla! What's the matter with you?"

"If you please, sir," said a voice at Noël's elbow. "I'd be pleased to hold the admiral's horse. I was a-goin' to offer, sir!"

Noël spun around with a blow already started. But his arm fell. There was no mockery in the face of the man with the clubfoot; he was looking benevolently upon the soldier, pulling his forelock with one hand while he reached for the reins of Thunder with the other. There was not the slightest trace of ridicule in his wide, childlike stare.

"You're several ranks too high," said Potter, with a smile banishing every trace of anger from his face, "and you've got the wrong branch of the service!"

"Beg pardon, sir, but I'm a seafaring man and I never hearn a voice like that except from an admiral of the fleet!"

Noël flung back his head and laughed. The mop of dark hair that had been so carefully trained and trimmed by a New York barber rumpled against his stock. This was like old times—a jest with the hostler, a drink at the bar, and a kiss from the maid.

"Did you hear that, Orla?" he cried. "If I ranked with my voice I'd be a full general!"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Noël!" Sibley giggled nervously. "And how would a hot rum toddy do before you ride on?"

"Ride on?" echoed Noël. "Did I say anything about riding on?"

"Er—no!" Sibley rubbed his hands furiously. "But Sibley's Tavern ain't just the place for fine gentlemen, with the rooms run down as they be late years, and—"

"Never mind that!" Potter turned to the man who was holding his horse. "What's your name?"

"Luke Thrall, sir."

"Give the horse four quarts of clean oats, Luke. See they're clear of dust, mind you! And a light forkful of hay. He's cool enough to drink. A bucket of water now, and what he wants after he eats."

"A gentleman as knows how to take care of his hoss!" exclaimed Thrall, admiringly.

"The Potters knowed how to race 'em, too!" giggled Sibley. "Ain't that so, Mr. Noël?"

Noël Potter grunted. Too many

hundreds of acres of the Potter inheritance, ore land and forest and meadow, had been lost on horses. Yes, and on cards and dice. He followed the tavern-keeper into the bar and looked about him. The same old prints of trotting horses on the walls, the same battered tables and bar that he had known ten years before. Orla had a big mirror behind the array of bottles. That was the only difference.

Noël took his steaming glass and went to a table that stood against the wall, opposite the bar. He wondered why the hand of Orla Sibley had trembled so that the drink spilled when he set it out. The room was empty of customers and there were some questions Noël wanted to ask Sibley. He looked up, but Orla had vanished from behind the bar like a shadow.

Before Potter could do more than set glass to lips a door at the rear of the bar was flung open and two men entered. They sat down and one of them pounded for service. Tough fellows, and brawny, thought Potter. They might be lake boatmen. A pimply-faced bar boy whom they hailed as "Ned" came in and drew whisky from a barrel.

Then the front doorway was darkened by that raw-boned, dark-browed man who had turned his back on Potter. Behind him trailed a round, solid companion of ordinary height, with a face set in an evil pattern. Noël tolerantly tried to think that nature was at fault for having put polka-dot eyes and a tiny nose and mouth in a great moon of flesh. He saw the bar boy sidling toward him, and beckoned to him.

"Ned," he asked, in a low voice, "who are those two fellows?"

"Tall un's Ahrent Perkins, sir," gulped the boy. "Fat un's Dick Wade. Them other uns is Tugger Blaw and Jake Garley."

THE boy had leaned over the table, resting both hands upon it. He stood back, and there was a square of white paper where one hand had rested. A folded, dirty fragment the size of a quarter.

"Wait!" commanded Noël, sharply. "Is that for me?"

"Yes, sir! What kind of a drink 'll it be?" loudly.

"A cigar, please," said Potter; and in a lower tone, "Who gave it to you?"

"Blind Samson, sir, the beggar... Cigar it is, sir!"

"All right!" Noël nodded. The note bore two words printed in pencil: "Look out!"

The boy scuttled away like a frightened rabbit. There was conversation, in low tones, at each of the two tables. Potter caught furtive glances flung at him by all but Perkins. That one stared, insolently, with a drooping mouth.

Noël began to wonder what it was all about. This was more than mere yokel curiosity and rudeness. Yet he had quarrel with no man in all the Adirondack wilderness. Even Saul Barnaby, the man who now owned the Potter house and home farm, had won it in all fairness from John, Noël's elder brother. At least so Noël supposed. And John, Lawyer Clayton Ashline had written, was missing and thought to be dead.

This assemblage here at the tavern might be for robbery. Ahrent Perkins was evidently waiting for something. Noël could see that as easily as he could tell that the big man was the leader of the others.

The boy Ned came with the box of

cigars; hesitated as though he wanted to say something, but went back to his polishing of glasses without a word. Then, without warning, a yell came from the sun-drenched highway. It was from a human throat but meant to be an imitation of a catamount's scream.

"Hoddy Prime's on the warpath agin!" announced Perkins, in a voice loud enough for Potter to hear. "Somebody 'll get chawed up!"

Noël wished for the pistols that were holstered on his saddle, for the light pair in his saddlebags, for his knife. In a strange country he would not have been separated from his weapons for a moment, but he had thought this was home.

He watched the doorway. Suddenly it filled with the broad figure of a man who swayed and stared belligerently around the barroom. He appeared to be very drunk. His sweeping glance came to rest on Noël's face, and remained there as though he were fascinated. Slowly he crossed the room and leaned against the table so heavily that the glass of rum tipped over. He laughed, and Noël, looking into his eyes, knew that he was only feigning his drunkenness.

"Don't your face ache from carrying your nose around?" guffawed Prime.

The Potter nose remained the same from generation to generation. Indubitably it was a large nose, but well-shaped. The Potters permitted themselves jokes about that nose, but the privilege did not extend to barroom brawlers.

A hundred and seventy pounds of bone and muscle, hardened by campaigning from the Rio Grande to the heights of Chapultepec, bent like a good whalebone whipstock and snapped from the chair at the table. Potter's fist drove straight for the fleshy nose of Hoddy Prime. There was a little turn of the wrist as it struck.

The man went backward across the room, and where his nose had been appeared a crimson mushroom. He was already falling when he struck the bar. His head thumped against the hardwood and he lay still.

NOËL POTTER swung around at the noise of feet and reached for his chair, a solid piece with a wooden bottom. He sent it like a stone from a catapult at the two men running toward him from the rear. One went down under the blow and swept the other with him.

Potter lifted the rum-slopped table over his head barely in time to meet the charge of Ahrent Perkins. A stout board cracked against the black-thatched skull. Dazed and blinded, Perkins reeled away. Then Noël realized, with a thrill akin to fear, that the "fat un," Dick Wade, was the most dangerous man in the room.

Wade was on his toes, moving with the lightness of a dancer, and in his hand he carried a long hunting knife with the point upward. He meant death. It was in his eyes. Noël leaped backward and vaulted the bar, just in time to avoid a rush from one of the men at the rear. He threw a bottle of whisky and stopped him.

Now Wade started around the end of the bar. Noël threw another bottle, but the fat man's head moved easily and it smashed against the wall. Potter was cornered, and the knife was coming in for the final attack.

He set one hand on the bar; the other on the bottle shelf behind it. Wade must have thought that a double kick was coming for his head. He

crouched a little lower. Then, in a twinkling, Noël was standing on the bar. He leaped into the air and came down with both booted feet on one of the fat man's shoulders.

Wade, seasoned rough-and-tumble fighter though he undoubtedly was, had obviously expected nothing like this. Under that crushing weight on one shoulder he grunted and sagged. The knife dropped, and with both hands he clawed at his tortured ribs. That blow had jammed him down like a jack-in-the-box.

Noël sprang lightly to the floor on the other side of the bar. The battle lagged. Hoddy Prime was unconscious. So was the man who had met the bottle. His companion sat on the floor nursing a scalp widely cut by the chair. Ahrent Perkins tried dizzily to charge, but Potter put him down with a crack on the jaw.

Wade was pulling himself along, with pain-filled eyes. Noël kicked him out of the room, into the trampled dust before the tavern. That was an idea! He dragged Perkins to the door by the collar and heaved him forth. Then Luke Thrall came panting in from the rear. Sweat drops gleamed on his ruddy face.

"Lor' love me!" he cried. "I've seed 'em laid out like that by a marlinspike, but—five to one, an' fists!"

"Finish it, Luke," said Noël. He wiped his hands on a handkerchief of fine linen. "I came in here for a peaceful drink and I'm going to try to get one."

"Aye, aye, sir!" Thrall, dragging his clubfoot with amazing speed, went about clearing the room. He took the man with the broken head last, and did not return. Potter rapped for service. The head of Sibley was thrust in, cautiously.

"Get me a drink, Orla," said Noël. "And tell me what excuse you've got for these brigands! Speak up, and speak fair, or I'll wring your scrawny neck!"

Sibley spilled good Medford rum as he mixed a drink. His Adam's apple danced up and down, and he stood swallowing and stuttering before the table.

"You'd better go on, Mr. Noël!" he managed, at last. "I'll get your horse myself as soon as you've drunk what you want!"

"You mop rag!" roared Potter. "Get your best room ready! If there's any more trouble for me I'll see that the coffin-maker is given work to do!"

Orla Sibley shivered as in a cold wind. For a moment Potter felt sorry for him; he was so evidently unequal to the storm that had gathered about his house. But Noël Potter was too angry to give much concern to anything save his own affairs just now. He drank and strode out, with a quick glance to right and left as he stepped over the threshold. It would not have surprised him if some one had been waiting there to bring an ax-helve down over his head. Only the motionless blind beggar was in sight.

Noël had no time to thank him. His horse needed attention.

HE had not forgotten his way about the stables. Everywhere he saw evidences of neglect. Disintegration was fast coming upon a tavern that had once been proud of its cellar, its clean beds, and hearty table. Clapboards flapped. The tops of the big chimneys were ragged with broken bricks. The horse stable was silent except for the munching of the animals, but Thunder nickered at the sound of Noël's step.

He went in beside the big horse and was nosed affectionately. The feed was right; clean oats and enough hay. Noël turned away from the stall and found saddle, bridle and saddlebags hanging on a wooden arm. He swung the saddlebags over his shoulder and took his long horse pistols from their holsters.

Abruptly his hand stayed. The gleam of the percussion caps was gone from the nipples under the hammers. Some one had taken pains to draw his teeth in case he retreated to the stable during the fight! Noël dropped a ramrod down the barrels and found that the charges had not been drawn. Grimly he put on fresh caps.

He looked up suddenly, at the creak of a board, to meet the earnest gaze of Luke Thrall. The cripple was peering at him from behind the partition of an empty stall. Now he came forward frankly enough with a smile spreading its creases over his face. His maimed foot dragged, but he fairly bustled with eagerness.

"Lemme carry them things, sir! Everything all right?"

"All but the pistols, Luke," answered Noël, as he started for the tavern. "It's lucky I didn't need them! Did you see any one come in here?"

"No, sir, not before I left the stables."

Potter rounded to the front of the building, with Luke a respectful three paces behind. The riffraff of the brawl had not returned as yet, and of other guests there was no sign. But the man with the great black patch remained with his back against the wall. He reached for his cup.

"Help the blind!" he said hoarsely.

Close inside, Sibley was waiting, and Potter had no intention of betraying his blind friend—if he were a friend—to the dubious innkeeper. With the look of a stricken man, Sibley led, and Potter and Luke Thrall followed; up what had once been a somewhat impressive winding stairway, along a corridor, and to a big corner room at the front of the house. A girl in ragged calico, with a browbeaten look, finished making up the four-poster. She filled the water pitcher and left.

"Orla," said Potter, "bring me up a good meal. Roast beef and ale and anything else that will line a man well for hard work. Wait a moment, Luke, I want to talk to you!"

Sibley hurried out. Noël sat down in a great stuffed chair. He took off his tall beaver hat and set it on the floor, loosened his stock, and rumpled the fine dark hair that was so carefully tended. It was the first time he had relaxed since he dismounted at Sibley's tavern.

"Luke," he said, "why did those five men try to thrash me? Robbery?"

"No, sir!" answered Thrall. The chambermaid came in again with towels, and he pulled a long face and rolled his eyes in her direction. As she went out Potter caught a glance from her of some significance which he could not read.

"Now, what's all this mystery?" he said to Thrall.

"It is and it ain't what you might call a mystery, sir. But they do say somebody's bringing goods down the lake from Canady, without bothering to pay duty. It might be you was took for an officer."

"Ah!" murmured Potter. He was less than half satisfied with the explanation. Ahrent Perkins and his bullies could have taken their time to shoot a customs officer from ambush; but they had been in a great hurry to finish

Noël Potter. Their boldness argued no fear that the government was behind him.

"But me," said Thrall, "I don't make no truck with lawbreakers."

"Well, Luke, you tell these rowdies that I'm not an officer of the law. They probably wouldn't believe me. I'm a soldier out of service and home on a visit. Understand?"

He drew forth a five-dollar gold piece and held it out to Thrall, who pulled his forelock and pouched the coin.

"That I will, sir! Nor I wouldn't take money from a fighting man like you, but I'm poor as a church mouse, what with honesty and this leg!"

"All right," said Potter. "Luck to you!"

CHAPTER II.

STRANGE WARNING.

THRALL went out, with another bobbing of his bullet head at the door, and instantly Noël Potter sprang to action. War had taught him to trust nothing in an enemy country. He lifted the muslin valance that ran around the bed and looked underneath. Then he lifted the straw-filled tick from a mesh of woven ropes, probed the great feather bed on top of the tick, and explored the pillows with a careful hand. It was possible, of course, to hide a rattlesnake in a man's bed, or fix a paper-thin knifeblade there.

Next, Potter kicked up the braided rugs from the floor and searched the painted boards for evidence of a hidden opening. Then he went to a door, the only one except that by which he had entered, and flung it open with a quick backward step. The emptiness of a clothes closet met him. He tapped the wall here; then the walls of the chamber.

"If somebody wants me killed he'll try more than once!" muttered Potter, as he examined the lock on the door and the brass bolt.

He drew the charges of his pistols and reloaded them. With those effective weapons, each of which carried a ball half as big as a pipe-bowl, laid out on the battered chest of drawers he peeled off his long-tailed blue coat. His tight waistcoat of gayly figured silk dropped to a chair and he rolled his shirt sleeves to the shoulder.

Now the swift outcome of that fight in the barroom was explained. Long muscles rose under the white skin at each movement. Gaunt as a hound in the hunting season, Potter carried most of his weight above the waist. He had been built and trained for a fighting man.

By the time he had finished washing and working his long hair into that careless sleekness which was the vogue in the late Forties, there was a knock at the door.

Noël stepped close to his pistols before he answered:

"Come in!"

Orla Sibley brought a trayload of dinner which looked good to a hungry man, and smelled better. But his hands shook so that the dishes rattled as he put the tray down upon a small table and turned toward the door.

"Wait!" Potter kicked the door shut. In a leisurely fashion he took a plate and put upon it bits chosen from every dish that the tray carried. He even turned some of the high mug of ale into a small glass tumbler. Then he picked up a pistol.

"Mr. Noël!" groaned Sibley. "What be you up to now?"

"Eat!" commanded Potter. He cocked the pistol. The face of the tavern-keeper went gray; his legs gave out under him and he sank down beside the bed, holding to one of the posts.

"No!" he cried. "I ain't hungry!"

"That's just what I thought!" Noël laughed grimly, and put down his pistol. He lifted the kneeling man with one hand and with the other ripped away his neckcloth. Then he set his fingers into Sibley's throat and began to bring them together. "Why are you trying to poison me? Was it to rob my saddlebags? There's no more than a handful of gold in them, you fool!"

"I ain't done nothing to you!" gurgled Sibley. "All I want—is to be —let alone!"

"Then who is trying to poison me?" The fingers of steel closed tighter. Sibley's eyes popped; his face darkened. Potter relaxed his grip. "Now will you talk?"

"Finish it quick!" gasped Sibley in a voice of death. "This ain't so bad as it would be if I told!"

Noël Potter considered him thoughtfully. Here was the courage of despair. He set Orla on his feet.

"Go downstairs and bring me something you'll be willing to eat yourself," he ordered. "For, by the Eternal, you'll taste of every dish of food I eat in this house! And of every drink I take!"

SIBLEY staggered out, with dishes sliding on the tray. Noël sat down, filled with a mixture of emotions. He was astonished, alarmed, curious, and fighting mad. After a moment he rose and brushed hat, coat, and light-colored pantaloons. He wiped every speck of dust from his varnished boots.

The saddlebags he had already opened for his dressing case; now he went into them again for powder, ball, and caps, and two small but accurate pocket pistols. When they were loaded he put one in his breast pocket and the other through a loop made for that purpose in his waistband. A wicked-looking bowie-knife, such as Davy Crockett had used at the end of his last fight in the Alamo, went between shirt and waistcoat.

Orla Sibley came back with another dinner, and this time the landlord ate readily enough of his own fare. He was weighed down, however, by a great silence, and he went hurrying out when Potter told him to have Thunder saddled at once. The meal was good. The ale was better. Noël went downstairs with a heart for battle, if need be.

Luke Thrall was holding Thunder at the horseblock. With a nod to him, Potter ran his fingers over each strap of the bridle, opened the horse's mouth, and inspected the bit, and lifted his feet one after another. An injury to the tender center of the hoof or a little tampering with the nails of a shoe would make trouble; perhaps cost the rider his life. Luke stood by with a wooden face.

Potter had campaigned where the hand of every man was against him, but he was very nearly caught this day, and by one of the most obvious of tricks. He had a foot in the stirrup when he remembered one more precaution. He unbuckled the girth and ran his hand up under the saddle. His fingers brought away a jagged piece of dark-colored glass which looked as though it had been broken from the bottom of a brandy bottle.

"Thrall!" Noël roared, whipping around. "Did you saddle?"

"Yes, sir!" answered Luke prompt-

ly. "But they was some of them cusses hangin' around!"

"All right!" Potter waved him aside. He tightened the girth and drew the bridle rein over his arm. Then he walked slowly, leading Thunder, up to the beggar sitting in the sun. It was very quiet; a stale odor of grease and whisky, a clatter of dishes came faintly from the tavern.

The beggar got up and began to tap the ground with his stick.

"Are you Blind Samson?" asked Noël.

"Aye, sir!" huskily. He reached for his cup.

"Thanks," said Potter very softly. "What means all this?"

"Help the blind!" barked Samson.

Noël dropped a handful of silver into the cup and turned away with Thunder. Even if Blind Samson had sent that warning, he obviously was unwilling to be seen talking to Noël here.

Potter mounted without going back to the horseblock, and the horse broke into a canter. He tried to cool his rage, stirred to fever heat by that wicked bit of glass. After all, there was a dash of sport in the affair: a mysterious warning, a benevolent crippled giant, and a poisonous tavern keeper.

THAT morning he had intended to make his first call on Lawyer -- Clayton Ashline, in Potterstown, who had notified him of his brother's presumed death, and to whom he had recently written that he was coming home. Now Noël changed his mind. He headed for the home of the Rev. Enoch Warren, who had preached in the village church through Noël's boyhood and who had taught him and his brother their first Greek and Latin. From the old minister, as from no one else, he could get a sympathetic account of the end of John Potter; and if Enoch Warren knew why Noël was not welcome in his own country he would tell.

Potterstown clustered around a bend of the Crocus River. It lay back a matter of three miles from the tavern and the turnpike where stage coaches carried mail and passengers north and south. The house that had been the Potter home was up the river a mile from the village. Noël did not want to see either Potterstown or his former home just now, and he was glad that the Warren cottage was well away to one side of the handful of white houses to which his family had given its name.

He rounded a turn of the wooded road and saw the little house, nestling against a hill, with a streamer of smoke floating lazily from the kitchen chimney. The lilacs and syringas were in blossom, as he had remembered them. He looked to see a long-legged girl, a wispish creature, come racing out with a puppy. Behind the diamond panes of one of those dormer windows Enoch Warren had written his sermons and worked upon his never-ending translation of the Odyssey.

At the gate in the picket fence Potter drew rein. He swung down and walked up the narrow pathway, that gave no sound to his bootheels. Abruptly he stopped. On a bench under a big maple sat a young woman, reading. A dog lay at her feet. A great cluster of purple lilacs was caressed by her slim hand.

Noël felt that he had plunged suddenly into that world of peace and beauty that he had been seeking; no more the smell of burned powder, the ring of steel. No more dust and blood and agony. His world had been racked by battle and death. He breathed deep-

ly, as though a physical effort could take in the spirit of what he saw and felt to be there. The dog raised his head and showed a gray muzzle. Then the girl lifted her eyes.

Clear depths, Noël thought, where a man could gaze and forget his own troubles. They were calm even now, at this unexpected sight of a stranger; peaceful as the June sky that was unvexed by any cloud. She rose, and the flounces of her wide hoop skirt settled gracefully about her. Here was a girl who was greater than her clothes. A lace shawl fell from her slender shoulders. Potter sprang forward, sweeping off his beaver with his best cavalryman's flourish, and recovered it.

"Thank you," she said. Her fingers touched his, and they were like cool flowers. "Do you wish to speak with me, sir?"

"I came to find the Rev. Enoch Warren," he told her, in a voice that sounded far and faint to his own ears. "I am Noël Potter."

Surprise, sadness, and quick pleasure swept her face. She smiled.

"Noël Potter!" she exclaimed softly. "The gallant young Noël who needs must go to the wars!"

"You aren't—the little girl—"

"Fay Warren! And this is Flash, my dog! You remember us?"

"Of course!" he cried. "But I looked for a little girl and a puppy when I rode up! I find a grown dog and—a beauty!"

"WELL said, sir! You have learned something besides the sword!"

"Your father?" he asked, smiling. The world was taking on a new aspect for Noël. At last he began to feel that he had come home to something.

"My father is gone," she said soberly. "He left us three years ago."

"I'm sorry!"

Potter could say nothing more, but he knew that she understood. Her father had been part of his boyhood; he had thought of things here as fixed, immutable.

Noël found himself sitting down beside her on the bench, with the rare sweetness of lilacs in his nostrils and a feeling of rest in his heart. Flash nosed his hand; sat down contentedly and leaned against his leg. He realized that the girl's eyes had searched his face, and seen beyond it. That was like her father.

"You have come home to stay?" she asked.

"I don't know." Suddenly Potter felt that he could talk to her as he would have talked to Enoch Warren. "I must have been homesick, and I wanted to learn what really happened to John, my brother. There were only the two of us. Lawyer Ashline wrote me that John had disappeared and was considered dead, and that the home had passed into the hands of Saul Barnaby. I supposed it was cards or dice, of course. But it was his to lose, for he was the elder son. I thought your father could tell me more. Or maybe there isn't anything to tell."

"Wait!" she said, and left him swiftly.

In a moment she had returned and was dropping something into his hand. He looked down at the Potter crest, carved in bloodstone.

"The Potter ring!" he exclaimed.

"Last spring they found the body of a man in the lake," she said quietly. "There was no way of telling who he was, but Dr. Hendricks found this ring. No one else saw it. He brought it to me because he and your father

and my father were such close friends. He wanted no scandal to attach to the Potter name, and no one knows about this ring. But nearly every one here thinks, even without knowing of the ring, that John killed himself. He disappeared in the winter, you know. It was common talk that Barnaby had enough of John's I. O. U.'s to fill a hat, although they were very friendly to the last."

"Does Dr. Hendricks think John killed himself?" asked Noël in a low voice.

"No, he said the Potters always fought to the end."

"What do you think?"

"I feel sure John did not kill himself."

Noël turned so that he faced her squarely. There was that in her voice and eyes which told him she spoke with meaning. She seemed to be studying him, to learn how much more she could say.

"Fay!" he cried. "There's something wrong here. I'm going to tell you what's happened to me since I rode up to Orla Sibley's tavern to-day. Then you'll understand."

When he had finished the story of the past few hours, sparing nothing, there was silence for a moment.

"Fear," said Fay gravely, "is written in all this. Some one is afraid of you. Who knew that you were coming?"

"Ashline."

"Lawyer Ashline is honest, I think. No doubt he mentioned your letter. It went to the ears of some person who fears you enough to kill you. And that is a great deal, Noël!"

"If I thought it was that lean and hungry Barnaby I'd wring his neck! But why? On account of John? What do you know, Fay?"

"Perhaps more than I think I do," she answered enigmatically. "Patience, Noël! You may not know it, but stories of your deeds have come back to us. You are a fire-eater, they say, quick to anger and dangerous. If a man had reason to fear you on account of John's death he would want you out of the way. Moreover, the smugglers of the northern lake are said to make Sibley's Tavern a rendezvous. Do you see how it all fits together? If you disappear, that will be an end of the matter, and the smugglers can be blamed!"

"WHY should any one have killed my brother? Why Barnaby, if he had won all there was to win?"

"Neither of us knows that, Noël!"

"I shall find out!" came grimly from him.

She lifted the spray of lilac and touched it with her lips thoughtfully.

"Will you come here to-night?" she asked at length. "I think I shall be able to show you something."

"I will come whenever you want me!" exclaimed Potter. He wanted to add, "always." Fay Warren was the substance of a dream come true. "That is, if I'm still alive this evening!"

She smiled with him, but her eyes were serious.

"You would be welcome to come here as a guest in my house," she said, "but I believe you will learn more if you stay at the tavern. And because you have no fear, you are kept in a care greater than mine. Fear will destroy your enemy, whoever he is."

Potter believed her, being there in the magic of her presence. It required an effort of will to rise and take his leave; but the shadows were growing

long. He bent over her hand. A cycle of Cathay seemed to stretch between him and his return.

Flash escorted him to the gate and gave a farewell bark. Thunder nickered welcome. The remembrance of an ancient hope came to Noël Potter. A woman, a dog, and a horse, and the peace of the everlasting hills which were home to him—but, as always, there was fighting to be done first. He rode very slowly away from that place of quiet happiness.

The dust lay thick on the winding road, and Thunder's hoofs made no more than a faint padding sound. Potter turned a sharp corner and saw the back of a man sauntering ahead; he knew that threadbare coat, the tin cup that hung at the belt. But this man walked easily and swung his stick with a capable hand as no blind man does.

The iron shoe of Thunder struck a stone. Instantly the man ahead leaped sidewise into the underbrush and only his head and shoulders and the black patch over his face showed as Potter came abreast of him and halted. For a long moment there was motionless silence.

"Samson!" said Noël sharply.

"Aye, sir!" croaked the beggar. "Barnaby's trying to kill ye!"

Instantly he was gone, and the sound of crashing underbrush drew farther and farther away. It was useless to dismount and try to follow him. After a minute or two Potter rode on, but he would have been willing to bet more dollars than he could afford to lose that there was a good pair of eyes under that black cloth.

But by the time he reached the tavern Potter had ceased trying to understand this phenomenon, or any part of the mystery that surrounded him. He made up his mind to ride straight into the press, and take his fighting where he found it. There was something pleasanter than the next attempt on his life to carry in his thoughts. He had seen Fay Warren.

BEFORE Noël could dismount, Sibley popped into the barroom doorway. The ever-attentive Luke Thrall came limping hastily from the stable. But the half dozen men who were loafing about gave no more than passing glances to Potter. These included all the veterans of the fight, except for Wade and Hoddy Prime. Ahrent Perkins looked the other way and whittled.

"Gentleman to see you, Mr. Noël!" exclaimed Sibley anxiously as he came running out. Thrall exercised his marvelous quickness and was in time to hold a stirrup. "Mr. Saul Barnaby is in the parlor, sir!"

That was a shock like a musket ball. Noël took instant command of his face and tried to assume the utmost indifference. He ran a hand down the neck of Thunder and along his flank.

"Water him," he said to Luke. "Ah, yes, Orla! Tell Mr. Barnaby that I'll be with him directly. I'm going up to wash myself clear of dust now."

He took the horse pistols from their holsters and thrust them into the tail pockets of his coat. The hearty voice of Thrall approved that action.

"Right and proper, sir, to keep them popguns with ye!"

Potter went bounding up the stairs to his room, dashed some water over his face, and walked downstairs again with his small arsenal still in his pockets. He entered the parlor with a grave dignity masking his readiness for battle.

Saul Barnaby rose from the long haircloth sofa to meet him, and for a

moment the two men stood appraising each other. Of Barnaby Noël remembered little except that he had been the boon companion of his elder brother. Before him he saw a man tall and lean with an inscrutable eye, a man who gave him the feeling of hidden strength. The leanness Potter remembered, but not the gray that touched the slightly sunken temples.

"Welcome home, Noël!" he exclaimed, with a gleam of teeth. "I learned from Ashline of your coming and to-day one of my men brought word that you were here, and involved in some kind of trouble—"

Barnaby stopped and stared at Noël's hand, with the color slowly draining out of his face. His gaze was fixed on the ring. He became ashen, and great drops stood out on his forehead. It seemed to Noël that but for iron control the man would have trembled from head to foot.

"You're looking at the ring?" asked Potter. "My brother John wore one like it."

"Ah, that's it!" It seemed as though Saul Barnaby had been released from the gates of hell. He breathed again, and tried to force a laugh. "A duplicate! It startled me. Poor John! We were very close to each other. If I had known his financial condition, or that he would take his losses as we think he did, I'd never have played!"

"It was most unfortunate," agreed Noël. Those impenetrable black eyes told him nothing.

"I came," went on Barnaby, "to ask you to dinner. I lead a quiet life and any evening will do for me. To-night? To-morrow? You'd like to see the house again, naturally."

"To-morrow night, with pleasure," answered Noël, promptly.

"Excellent! That brawl here, by the way, was not a serious matter, I trust?"

"Not for me," answered Potter. "In fact I was stiff from the saddle and a little exercise went very well."

"Ah!" Saul Barnaby laughed. "My congratulations on your prowess."

He took his leave, offering his hand again, and went out to his waiting horse. Potter watched him ride away, carrying himself well in the saddle. Barnaby had acted his part, but he was in too great haste; and the ring had staggered him.

Again Noël ate in his room, after Orla Sibley had proved with his own stomach that the food was harmless. Then he shaved with great care and set out for the home of Fay Warren. The tavern was quiet when he left it, unhindered, and the beggar with the black patch had returned to sit in the dusk.

CHAPTER III.

THE CRONE'S VISION.

THE stars were out when Noël came to the Warren cottage. The windows gleamed a welcome and Flash came sedately to meet him. An elderly woman servant answered his knock and led him into the tiny parlor; a room of books and chintz curtains and sketches which he guessed had been made by Fay.

He did not hear her until she stood beside him, with the long skirt of a riding habit looped up over her arm. She smiled at his astonishment.

"We're to take a short journey to-night, Noël," she said, "and I think you'll find it worth while. At the worst it will be no more than a little time lost."

The servant brought a lantern and

set a candle in it. Noël went with Fay to the stable and saddled her horse. It was she who led the way, after they were mounted, back into the foothills and over a road that Potter would not have cared to drive in a chaise. For a long time they said little, silenced by the spell of the night, but at length Noël told her of the visit from Barnaby and the invitation to dinner.

"I felt that you ought to go back to the tavern," she said. "You accepted, of course?"

"Naturally. The man is giving me just what I want—a chance to learn whatever there is to be learned."

"You will probably be safe until to-morrow night," Fay said. "If what we both feel is true, then he has decided to take the work out of the hands of bunglers."

"You seem so sure," began Noël, "and yet we have few or no facts other than Samson's warning to connect Barnaby—"

"Wait!" she interrupted. "In a little while you may understand my feeling."

The horses were picking their way toward a lighted window, dim and alone in the night. As Potter tied them to a tree he saw the outlines of what appeared to be a wretched log cabin, such as a charcoal burner might inhabit. Fay knocked and called out her name. Then she pushed open the door and Noël followed her into a low room marked by the stamp of poverty and old age.

Bunches of herbs hung drying from the roof; shelves pegged up against the log walls held strange odds and ends of household gear. In one corner stood a spinning wheel; in another a low bed of home manufacture. There were a few uncertain splint-bottom chairs. Beside a big fireplace, of rough stonework, an old woman crouched on a wooden stool.

She took a black clay pipe out of her toothless mouth and turned her head at the appearance of Fay and Noël, but she gave no sign of surprise. There was about her the appearance of timelessness; it was as though she had seen all things and no longer responded to any astonishment. Her face was wrinkled parchment; her hair a draggled travesty. Even the shapeless gown she wore was a mingling of patches which must have represented many generations of clothing.

"I have brought Mr. Noël Potter with me," said Fay, in a clear voice. "Noël, this is Mag Botts."

To his surprise the old woman bestirred herself. She rose, slowly, and curtsied; then sank down again upon her stool. The light played upon her face more clearly now, from a candle that burned in a wooden holder at one side of the fireplace. Potter, who had at first withdrawn inwardly from everything in that room, was moved to pity.

"Set ye down," said Mag Botts. "Will ye have tea or rum to drink?"

"Neither for me," answered Fay, pulling off her gloves. "Mag, we're much too earnest about our business to-night to take the time."

"Aye, young folks is earnest. 'Tis only the old have time to waste."

"This is a matter of life and death," said Fay.

"Which is which?" mumbled the old woman. "Hell's groans! I dunno!"

"WILL you see your pictures for us to-night, Mag?" Fay leaned forward; there was pleading in her voice.

"I'll do what I can for the pure in heart, Miss Fay! And that's you, if

ever anybody was! But 'tain't allus I can see things. I'll try for ye."

"Thanks, Mag!"

"And my thanks, too!" added Potter, heartily. That Mag Botts loved Fay was enough to erase for him all her wrinkles, to banish all her uncomeliness. The old woman grinned at him. Her vividly dark eyes were still young, he saw, and like the blue eyes of Fay Warren they held the quality of seeming to see beyond the flesh.

"She's a fair maid," said Mag, as though she read his thoughts. She blew out the candle and began to rake down the fire.

"What is it?" asked Noël, in a low voice. "Magic?"

He had tried to speak for the ears of Fay alone, but Mag Botts was not deaf. She turned quickly.

"They's no such thing as magic, young soldier. They's nothing happens but by the Lord's will. Nor you nor me can't change it."

It was evident that Fay had known this experience before. She set a chair for Noël and one for herself, somewhat back in the shadows which filled the room with the loss of candlelight and the dimming of the fire. No more than a faint and dusky glow touched their faces. Fay lifted her hand for silence as Mag Botts dragged her stool around in front of the fireplace and sat down beyond the radius of light.

The glow from the embers was sufficient to reveal a dark timber, set into the stonework above the fireplace opening. It looked like black walnut, darkened and polished by time and rubbing so that it presented a surface clear and deep as a mirror. Potter could just perceive that upon this the gaze of Mag Botts was fixed in a kind of mesmeric fascination.

"Can you see Saul Barnaby?" asked Fay, in a low voice. "Try to see the last game he played with John Potter."

"Aye!" answered Mag, after a moment. "It's a room with a mighty slew o' books all up and down the walls. And they's no joy in the devil's mug of Barnaby!"

Potter leaned forward, but he could see nothing upon the black surface where the gaze of Mag Botts rested. Nevertheless he found himself gripped by a swift and overpowering interest. So far as he knew this woman had never seen the inside of the Potter home. Yet she had named the library. That was where the men gathered for cards, invariably.

"Tell us more," said Fay, very softly.

"All I can do is tell ye what I see." There was the sound of struggle in the voice of Mag. "They ain't no way for me to say what it means. But Barnaby looks powerful mad, Miss Fay. And the other young man is mad, too, only different. He's the gentleman. Oh, glory—they're—"

Her voice stopped. Potter sprang to his feet.

"Go on!" he cried. "What?"

"It's gone," said Mag. "Barnaby had jumped up and the other gentleman was a gettin' up. I figgered they was going to fight. Then the picture went."

"Can't you get it again?" exclaimed Noël.

"The same one don't often come twice."

FAY pulled Noël gently down to his chair.

"Can you see what became of Mr. John Potter?" she asked.

"Mebbe so." Mag Botts humped over, like a great snarl of patches, and became motionless. For a minute or

more there was no sound but the heavy ticking of an ancient clock. Then Mag stirred, and sighed, and rose from her stool.

"They wasn't nothing much come that time," she said, as she thrust a splint into the fire and lighted her candle. "I didn't see nothing but stone walls and a light striking down on the young gentleman's face. Then the picture got dark and I couldn't see nothing more. When they're weak it's time to quit."

Noël Potter gripped the fingers of Fay and started to speak. Then he closed his jaws with a snap and thrust a hand into his pocket.

"Mag," he said, "I'm grateful for this and I hope you'll let me give you something."

"If ye got plenty a jinglin' in your pocket, young soldier, I'll be glad of a shillin' or two. But if ye ain't got more'n ye have need of, 'twould be sin for me to take any."

Noël took out a five-dollar gold piece and dropped it into her hand. On a sudden impulse he bent down and touched his lips to her forehead.

"Thank you," he said.

"Now God be with ye in what's closer to your heart than them pictures!" cried Mag. She choked, and put the money into her pocket without looking at it. "Aye, they's no finer work than a gentleman! Not e'en Miss Fay herself!"

Noël and Fay were out under the stars again, and mounted, before either of them spoke. Then, as they rode away from Mag Botts's cabin, the girl broke the silence.

"Do you think you've learned anything?" she asked.

"First," said Potter, in a strained voice, "tell me what those pictures are, and why. And what your faith is in them and Mag Botts. I'm convinced that she's kindly and well disposed."

"That, and more," answered Fay, "as the sick hereabouts have good reason to know. She nurses them equally well with or without pay. Of her pictures neither I nor any one can tell you much. They're a form of crystal-gazing. There are people who say they can see the past and future, and things happening at a distance. Perhaps this is Mag's vanity, and perhaps she sees things. Of course she has means of knowing the countryside secrets, with her peddling of herbs and her nursing. It is certain that at least part of what she says is true. That much I know from experience!"

"She has told you something that —fitted the facts?"

"She told me that a horseman was coming, a man with a clear eye and a strong arm," answered Fay. "She said he was a man who lived by the sword and who, but for a certain thing, would die by the sword!"

"And what was that certain thing?" asked Noël.

"Courage! His own, and another's!"

"Your courage, Fay!" He rode closer. "I—"

"The end is not yet, Noël!" she said quickly. "Tell me, please, whether her picture meant anything to you?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Potter, with certainty. "Why Barnaby was angry over the cards I don't know, for he must have been winning. But that second picture was different. Fay, under the library at home there is a stone chamber that has no outlet except by a trapdoor in the floor. Once my father opened it and lowered a lantern, when John and I were youngsters. I remember how the light flashed on the stone walls. That's the place where she saw

John, with the trapdoor open above him. When the picture grew dark it was because that trapdoor was closed above him."

"Noël! It could not be! Not even Saul Barnaby would do such a terrible thing!"

"Men will do strange things for lands, or money, or women," he told her. "I have seen them. Aye, and they'll do as strange for revenge!"

"Not you, Noël!"

He made no immediate answer. If this vision that had been conjured up by toothless Mag Botts were true then he asked only to be alone with Saul Barnaby. Until to-night he had forgotten the underground room beneath the library.

"I remember now," he said, thinking aloud, "that my grandfather said the room had been used for hiding valuables, and sometimes even the family, during Indian raids. The last time was when Burgoyne came down from Canada during the Revolution."

"But it was in the lake that they found—"

"He could have been left in that dungeon to die," said Potter, with the ring of iron in his voice. "The rest would have been easy. Barnaby would want to make it appear like an accident outside the house."

Fay made no reply to that; and when she spoke again it was of the soft beauty of the hills massed against a starlit sky. When they reached the cottage Noël stabled her horse, and she walked with him to the gate where Thunder waited.

"Would you care to go from here," she asked, "to that dinner with Saul Barnaby?"

"Care to?" he echoed. "There's only one answer to that! Does a man care to be happy what time he can?"

"Come whenever you like, then," she said. "I want you to go armed with something more than steel and gunpowder, Noël, if it is possible. That may be the hardest night of your life!"

She vanished into the shadows and an instant later her silhouette was against the lighted doorway; a proud and graceful form rising from the billowing outline of her skirt. The door closed. Noël Potter mounted and rode away into a night that had suddenly become lonely and aloof.

CHAPTER IV.

HOUSE OF MURDER.

THE tavern was dark except for a light in the bar and Potter decided to put Thunder up himself. He found a lantern hanging by the stable door, lighted, but when he took it down and entered, there was a pistol in his hand. A stir among the shadows brought the hammer up promptly.

"Show your face!" he commanded.

Luke Thrall rose from a keg beside the grain box.

"I knowed you was out, sir," he said, "and I waited around to put the hoss up."

"You'll get your reward, Luke," said Noël, as he released the reins.

He saw that Thunder was bedded knee high with clean straw and then took Thrall into the bar for a drink. After that he got a candle from the sleepy bar boy and went, with a cautious turning of corners, to his room. Once there he locked and bolted the door, set the chest of drawers against a half open French window, and again went through his daytime round of inspection. With his pistols lying beside the bed he felt that he could sleep in safety.

In the morning when Potter came back from his trip below stairs to order breakfast he found the bedraggled chambermaid hiding behind his door, and nearly had her by the throat before he saw who it was. She slipped past him to the doorway and paused there just long enough to whisper a single sentence.

"Blind Samson says not to go out to-night, sir!"

Then she was gone down the corridor as though death itself were at her heels. Noël restrained an impulse to go after her. If she had been trying to do him a service he would only get her into trouble by bringing her into his affairs. It might be that Samson was a real friend, but he had no intention of heeding the warning. That the hangers-on at this sinister tavern knew of his invitation from Barnaby argued no good.

A heavy-eyed Orla Sibley came up with breakfast and went through his trial of the food in silence. He was about to leave when Potter stopped him with a gesture; took up one of the horse pistols and leveled it.

"What do you know about the beggar with the black patch over his face?" asked Noël.

The tavern-keeper stared at the muzzle of the pistol and licked dry lips.

"Peter Samson? Why he was blowed up by a blast, so he says. He come from away, somewheres, quite a while back."

"Is that all you know about him?" Slowly Potter cocked the pistol. Sibley began to tremble.

"I swear it, Mr. Noël!" he cried. "They do say he's a little cracked."

This sounded like the truth to Potter. He lowered the hammer of his pistol and dismissed the tavern-keeper with a wave of his hand. Apparently it was useless for him to try to learn anything except by experience.

Samson was not in sight when Noël went down to get his horse. Nor was Luke Thrall about the stables. The bar boy came running out to help, but Potter sent him back. He was as well pleased to saddle Thunder himself, and make sure of girth and bit.

IT was a pleasant ride through a fair country and Noël Potter had very nearly forgotten the pistols in his holsters, the steel against his heart, by the time he reached the home of Fay Warren. She and Flash were waiting for him, under the great maple. The scent of the lilacs, white and purple, drifted across the little garden like a caress. Again Noël felt that he was on the threshold of a new world, where there could be no more sorrow.

Night came too soon. All things that he had seen and done and felt became insignificant to Noël beside this afternoon in the June sunlight, with an aging dog at his feet and the calm and lovely face of Fay Warren at a little distance. At sunset he made his reluctant body rise.

"If to-night is the end," he said, "I am not cheated!"

Her eyes clouded, and instantly cleared. She smiled, but Noël saw that her hands were trembling as she broke a spray of lilac and gave it to him.

"I have faith to believe that you will be protected," she said, slowly.

He lifted both her hands and crushed them and the lilacs against his lips. Then he turned to go, but her fingers pulled at his sleeve. Mistily he saw a rose-pink face close to his own.

"Kiss me once, Noël!"

A minute later Thunder was pounding furiously down the road. It was only when Noël came in sight of the

cleared fields which had once been Potter land that his whirling emotions calmed and steadied. Now he must have command of himself, and a mind held to a single purpose.

When Potter dismounted a man whom he did not remember having seen before came running to take Thunder. But he was sure he recognized the tall and broad form of Ahrent Perkins among the mowers who were just coming in to supper from the meadows. If Perkins was Barnaby's man the smugglers might be, too.

Noël stood before the fanlight doorway and lifted the great silver knocker. Before it could fall the door opened and a shapely young woman with a pert face looked him up and down. She wore cap and kerchief with her plain cotton gown and Potter judged that Barnaby was trying to maintain something of the former dignity of the Potter mansion.

The girl took his hat and gloves and opened the door of the library. The book-lined walls were the same. On a small table near the fireplace stood a carafe of what seemed to be port wine, and another of whisky. There were glasses. Noël remembered the strange message from Samson, that might have been a grateful warning. Would Barnaby try to-night by poison or steel or bullet? Or did he have some more devilish means prepared?

Noël crossed the room and took a book from the shelves. Barnaby might have prepared some wall crevice for the purpose of watching him so he pretended to examine the tooled binding while he inspected the room.

His father's great mahogany desk, flat-topped but with carved and paneled sides and great wide drawers underneath, had been moved out into the room. It stood where the trap-door had once opened to reveal to the boy Noël the ghostly depths of the stone chamber. At the sound of a step in the hall Potter replaced his book in a leisurely fashion and faced the door.

That Saul Barnaby meant to give the appearance of a disarming cordiality was evident as he entered with his hand extended and a fixed smile drawing back his thin lips. But the hand was limp and cold when Noël took it, and the eyes of the man wore the marks of a lack of sleep.

"Welcome!" he exclaimed, heartily. "If I had known just when you were coming, or how to forward an invitation, I should have asked you to make this house your home. But the letter to Ashline was vague, and gave no particular address in New York."

"Because I was already on my way," replied Noël. "But I've received every attention at the tavern."

"I fancied it was run down," said Barnaby. "It's said some rough characters make their headquarters there and that no stranger is safe. It's the smuggling that's brought them from far and near."

"War is not fought without rough characters," replied Noël, "and I've grown used to that."

BARNABY laughed politely and turned as a door at the rear of the room opened. The maidservant appeared and announced dinner. With a wave of his hand the present master of the house invited Potter to his table.

Noël had never been more alert than when he entered that high-ceilinged dining room; no outpost duty had sharpened his ears or tensed his muscles more than this meal which might be his last. He saw that the room was much as it had been. The

great sideboard gleamed with silver and glass, and gave back the light of a score of candles.

The table was weighted by an enormous roast of beef, a pair of richly browned fowls, a vast pink ham. If poisoning was to be attempted again it did not seem likely that the dining room would be the place for it. Barnaby must eat from the same meat, drink from the same bottles. Noël allowed himself a temperate meal, although with no slackening of his watchfulness.

Barnaby talked of the war, of New York, and of the new steam railroads which were creeping through the country. There was not a word spoken by him of the tragedy of John Potter, but when they went back to the library Noël realized instantly that something was impending. The feeling of a coming event was in the room like a fog.

While Saul Barnaby brought out cigars and poured coffee Potter swung his glance over every detail of his surroundings. He saw that the hangings had been drawn across the deep window embrasures while they were at dinner, and that the door leading into the hall was slightly ajar.

"And this Oporto you'll find worth trying," said Barnaby. He was standing with his back to Potter, hovering over a tray and glasses and a dusty bottle which he had taken from a cabinet. He turned and held up a wine-glass of ruby liquid before the light of a candelabrum. "It's old, and mellow, and a rare treat here in the wilderness!"

Potter took the glass. He ached with the intensity of his desire to read those black, expressionless eyes. It seemed to Noël that Fay Warren was very close in spirit to him now. Again he remembered the message from Samson, the beggar. Barnaby raised his own wine.

Noël took a sudden resolution. He touched his lips to the edge of the glass, made a pretense of choking, and set it down. As he did so he flashed a glance up at the face of Saul Barnaby and caught there just one swift instant of revelation. Potter took out his handkerchief and stepped back.

"A moment!" he said. He had no doubt now that the wine was poisoned, for he had seen hate and murder in the face of his host. He wanted to wring a confession from the man. Noël had only to move a few steps to reach the desk that covered the trapdoor. He set his wine down.

"Barnaby," he said, in a low voice, "you are trying to send me to join my brother!"

Slowly Barnaby lowered his glass. He paled, but there was no sign of weakening in that dark, hard face which had now lost all its semblance of urbanity. His hands dropped to his sides, but his well-nigh perfect control did not extend to his fingers; they worked back and forth as though they struggled to reach the throat of his guest.

"What is the meaning of such talk, sir?" he demanded.

"I'll show you!"

SUDDENLY Noël stooped and thrust with his shoulder against the desk; it took all of the power in his back and legs to move that massive piece of furniture, but he sent it scraping over the polished boards. For an instant, at the first glance, he thought the door had vanished. Then he saw that the cracks around the edges and the slot where the ring lay below the level of the floor had been filled with wax and smoothed down so

as to be almost invisible. He stood back, to stare with horror at the man he saw before him.

Saul Barnaby was as ghastly as he had been at the sight of the Potter ring. Now he trembled frankly, unrestrainedly, and in his face there was written an unmistakable sentence of death for Noël Potter. But riding down all other emotions was a terrible fear of the trapdoor. For the moment he was paralyzed. Noël drew his knife and with a sharp thrust pried the ring up.

"No!" shrieked Barnaby. "Not that!"

But Noël had already curled his fingers into the ring. He gave a mighty heave and the door came up; fell back against the floor with a thunderous sound that filled the room and half drowned a wild cry from Saul Barnaby.

Noël straightened. But before he could take a single step a movement reflected in a mirror at the opposite end of the room halted him; it knotted every muscle in a desperate effort to turn. For in the mirror Noël saw the curtains at one of the windows behind him part and reveal the great bulk of Luke Thrall. The cripple was bearing down upon him, with a face lighted by devilish triumph.

Noël turned, but his hand had no more than time to find the butt of one of his pistols. Then the enormous arms of Thrall pinned his own to his sides. Before he could get a foothold upon the waxed floor he was lifted bodily into the air. He saw the beamed ceiling spinning above him; heard the voice of Luke close to his ear.

"Be damned to your airs and graces now, me fine gentleman! Down ye go with the other one!"

Potter went down, twisting in the air like a cat. He tried to land on his feet and only half succeeded in turning before he struck with a force that knocked him almost senseless. It seemed that he was crushed and bruised and broken beyond endurance. The big door overhead banged down, shutting out all light. Noël groaned and tried to lift his tortured body.

Slowly the waves of pain receded. At last he could move, sit up, although with head and shoulders drooping forward to his knees. He had thought that his right arm was broken, but gradually power came back to it. Minutes passed before he could stand on his feet. His head cleared, little by little, until he could think and act.

He took a limping step and for the first time became conscious of a thick, soft coating spread over the bottom of the chamber. His boots sank into it; it must have broken his fall a little. He reached into a waistcoat pocket and found a card of the sulphur matches which were just coming into use in place of flint and steel. Noël rubbed one of them on a pistol butt and held it at arm's-length until the sulphur had burned off. He had a momentary glimpse of the chamber.

The room seemed empty of everything save the prisoner. But that coating on the floor disturbed him. It was not until he had lighted a second match that he realized what lay under his feet. He was walking on quicklime.

CHAPTER V.

THE QUICKLIME CELL.

NOW the diabolical story revealed itself in a flash. Noël Potter stood shaking like a man with ague. His brother had been thrown down there, dead or dying, and a great quantity of

quicklime emptied into the chamber. Later they might have thrust the remnants of him through a hole in the ice, into the lake. Else how explain the ring?

The trap had been hidden. No wonder Saul Barnaby did not want it opened. To-night, when he had intended to use poison, he had probably summoned Luke Thrall for the disposition of the body. Potter believed that he was there alive by accident; that they had not intended to use the trap at all. Of course he had no hope of mercy from the men up there in the library.

With that hope and that courage which is unquenchable in the heart of a brave man Noël lighted more matches and began a tour of his prison. At once he met with something which changed his theories. In one wall, at a little distance above the floor, he found an opening in the masonry big enough to admit a man on hands and knees. It would probably be out of sight of a casual inspection from the trapdoor. A heap of stones lay below the mouth of the opening, as though it had formerly been blocked up. Potter tried the mortar with his knife and found it soft and crumbling.

Had John escaped, only to go through the ice and drown? Certainly Barnaby could not know of this opening or he would never have allowed Noël to remain this long in the chamber; for the opening was quite evidently that of a tunnel which led somewhere.

The tunnel was roofed with timbers, solidly shored up, and that the wood had begun to rot proved it to be as ancient as the house itself. Probably it had been a way of escape from besiegers which had been walled up and the memory of it lost to the family.

Noël entered the tunnel. For what seemed an interminable time he moved forward awkwardly on one hand and his knees, with a pistol ready in his free hand. No sound came to him from either direction. At last, after it had begun to seem that there was literally no end to the passage, the blackness ahead all at once turned to the misty hue of a starlit night.

A breath of fresh air touched Potter's face. The murmur of waters reached his ears. A moment later he pushed out through a clump of alders and stood erect. Never had stars and tall black trees looked so welcome to him. The friendly river lay at his feet. He was within a few hundred yards of the house he had just left.

Noël had determined during that long journey back to the upper air that he would take Saul Barnaby out of his house and carry him across Thunder's back, like a sack of meal coming from the mill, to the sheriff.

Now, as he worked cautiously back toward the house, he saw the flicker of many lanterns in the rear, moving regularly back and forth between the barns and a point near the highway. Potter circled among outbuildings until he was near enough to learn the meaning of the lanterns.

Two great wagons, each with four horses, had been driven into one of the fields, and men were emptying them of bales, boxes, big wicker baskets, casks. Lying flat on his stomach in a growth of hay, Noël recognized Ahrent Perkins in command, with the others of the tavern gang bending under burdens which they carried to one of the barns. There the freight was swung up by block and tackle into a mow. Orla Sibley, not strong enough for a porter's work, managed the ropes.

The explanation was clear. A boat

from Canada had unloaded on some lonely beach and Barnaby was stowing the contraband away until it could be disposed of. Sibley's tavern, then, was a blind. This was the real rendezvous, and Saul Barnaby was the real leader. It was no wonder that he had grown rich; that he was able to have murder done at will. But now the end was at hand for him.

POTTER crawled away from his hiding place and went around to the front of the house. It was lighted above and below stairs, but the curtains were still drawn across the library windows, and he could not see in. However, since Barnaby was not with his men he was probably inside the house.

Noël preferred to enter by a window rather than risk meeting some one in the hall. He swung himself up by his hands to a balcony that ran in front of the windows. The knob of one of them turned under his hand, the window opened silently. The sound of voices came from beyond the hangings as he stepped into the embrasure. With a pistol cocked and ready, Noël pushed the heavy damask aside so that he could see into the library.

His grip tightened upon the pistol butt, his finger trembled against the trigger. For there within six feet of him, facing Barnaby and Luke Thrall, stood Fay. The gesture of the gloved hand with which she looped up the skirt of her habit defied them. It was as though she were preparing to abolish these two ministers of evil. Her eyes flashed. Here was a Fay Warren whom Potter had not seen before.

"Then you refuse to answer me?" she said, looking at Barnaby, absolutely unafraid.

"I have already answered you, Miss Warren!" He shrugged. "I have told you that Mr. Potter dined here and left, for the tavern, I suppose, a short time ago. I am surprised that you did not meet him on the road."

"Then why is his horse still stabled here?" she demanded boldly. "I made sure of that before I came to the house. Your men were much too occupied with their contraband to notice my presence."

Slowly Barnaby turned and looked at Luke Thrall. Potter read the meaning of that look as clearly as Thrall himself. Fay Warren had learned too much, and she had spoken her own sentence of destruction.

"Aye, aye, sir!" said Luke. He put his great strength to the desk, that had been replaced, and moved it aside. "Jest keep your nerve, Mr. Barnaby, better'n you done afore, and I'll promise she won't never tell nothing!"

Before Noël could make a movement the hand of Fay rose from the folds of her skirt. A little pistol gleamed and spat, and Luke Thrall staggered back, gripping one of his mighty shoulders.

Noël parted the damask hanging and stepped into the room. Fay turned, her face radiant with great joy at sight of him. Calmly she blow smoke from the pistol barrel. But Barnaby and Thrall were as though they had seen an apparition from the grave. Saul Barnaby swayed and clutched a chair.

"Man or devil!" he gasped. "He's gone through stone!"

"Stone walls nor poison don't make no difference to him!" Luke was the first to recover; to accept the fact that Noël Potter in the flesh stood before them. "I cooked a mess to the tavern that would 'a' laid 'im out, and he tried to make Sibley eat it!"

"We've got to the end now," said

Noël. "Don't try for the door, Luke, or I'll sink another ball into you!"

"What do you want with me?" whispered Barnaby. Then he shrieked. "Where's the other one? I left him down there! Could he go through stone and earth?"

"I want *you!*" answered Potter, and he began to take account of his next movement. Barnaby and Thrall were standing halfway down the room, with their backs to the dining room door. Noël and Fay Warren faced them from the windows. Between captors and captives lay the entrance to the stone chamber.

Noël did not know who first saw that the trapdoor was rising, nor when it began. He realized that all four of them were staring fascinated as that square of wood slowly lifted, moved by some power beneath. For once the eyes of Luke Thrall showed fear. Saul Barnaby shook like a man in the grip of a giant hand. Fay was leaning forward, breathless, flushed. Potter drew another pistol. He leveled one at the floor and the other at his prisoners.

The door was hinged toward Fay and Noël so that the others were the first to see under it. It raised halfway and stopped there, as though resting upon whatever was lifting it. Now Thrall went as white as his master; and Saul Barnaby pushed with trembling hands against the air, as though he would drive what he saw down into the dark void from which it had come.

"Get back!" he shrieked. "Get back to hell where you belong!"

AN arm shot out from beneath the trapdoor with the speed of lightning and gripped Barnaby by the ankle. That was all Noël could see; the arm and the long, strong fingers at the end of it. He held his pistol on Thrall. The arm drew in; irresistible, implacable as death. Barnaby took a step forward, stumbled, caught himself, and was at the very edge of the abyss.

Until this instant he had been dazed by terror. Now he struggled, bracing his free foot. He reached into his coat and drew a long-barreled pistol. But just as the pistol sprang into sight he went down with a jerk. Body and shoulders and gaping mouth vanished beyond the edge of the trap. The door banged. The muffled sound of a shot came from below.

With an effort Noël broke the spell that was upon him. He took out both of his light pistols and gave them to Fay. Luke Thrall was shaken, licking dry lips as he leaned heavily upon a chair, but in a moment or two he might be dangerous again. Fay nodded understanding; there was little need for words with her.

Noël pocketed one of his horse pistols and took a candlestick from the mantel. He lifted the trap carefully and let it down against the floor. The light from his candle did not penetrate far into the darkness below; all he could see at first was the upper part of a light ladder. A half stifled groan came up to his straining ears, and the sound of heavy breathing.

He had taken his knife in his teeth and set one foot on the uppermost rung when there was a movement below; something dragged over the stone flagging and laid hold upon the bottom of the ladder. It began to mount.

Potter drew back with streamers of cold racing up his spine. He held a pistol ready, and waited. Behind him he heard the whistling breath of Luke Thrall. A shape grew in the gloom below. It came up slowly, as though each rung of the ladder required desperate

effort. A white blur of face showed. With the next upward movement it came full into the candlelight.

"John!" cried Noël Potter. He leaped back from the opening, to stand at bay in front of the fireplace as though the powers of darkness were loosened against him. Across the distance that separated them he met the eyes of Fay Warren. They were calm, unflinching. He pulled himself together and looked down upon what the stone chamber gave up.

He saw a tangled mat of hair, a ghastly white face which had once been handsome, and a chin pitted blue with the marks of burned powder. On the neck there was the scar of an old, deep wound. The man rose waist-high into the room, leaning heavily upon the floor. A bright stain grew on the front of his shirt. From a cord around his neck dangled a patch of black cloth. He lifted agonized eyes to Noël.

"Help me, brother!" he whispered.

Noël Potter sprang to life. Tenderly he lifted the wounded man to a chair. John Potter swayed and sank against the cushioned back.

"Barnaby's finished me," he said in that husky voice which had belonged to the beggar at the tavern, "but my knife's in him to the hilt! He's gone first, and that's all I care!"

Noël knelt beside him, pistol in hand. He dared not relax his vigilance in that house. A hundred questions fought for utterance, but the dying man forestalled them.

"Blind Samson's pulled him down!" A faint smile touched John Potter's lips. His voice, weak as it was, carried through the room. "Clever of me, wasn't it, Noël? It was the only way I could stay in this country after I got out of there." He pointed downward.

"Barnaby would have killed me if he'd known I was alive. He tried hard once."

JOHN POTTER seemed to fall into a reverie.

Noël took his hand, and the fingers tightened against his own. "Tell me, John," he said.

"Aye, if there's time! You know what a fool I was, brother! Well, the last night of play I lost the Potter land, and I staked the Potter ring on one throw of the dice, against ten dollars. I won and asked for revenge. Noël, I ran that ten dollars up until I had the home and our own land once more. That was all I cared about.

"But then the real Saul Barnaby showed through. He refused to pay. And when I told him I'd take it out of his hide and brand him as a crooked gambler, he shot me! See his mark, Noël, on my neck? I've never spoken right since. Aye, he shot an unarmed man and threw him into the stone chamber to die.

"I went around and around on my hands and knees down there in the darkness, like a madman. I tapped the walls. There was a place that sounded differently. The old mortar was soft, and I dug with my knife. I found a tunnel that no one of our generation knew about."

John Potter paused and drew in great breaths of air, fighting for time to tell more. Noël leaped to the table beside the fireplace and poured a glass of whisky. Then he remembered the Oporto and turned to Luke Thrall.

"We'll try this first on you," he said.

Thrall went greenish gray to his fat neck. Noël thrust the muzzle of a pistol into his stomach, and the fellow drank. The color came back to his face with a rush. Noël poured another glass for his brother.

"It was bitter cold, that night," said John after a moment. "A shantyman from the lake shore found me in the snow and took me home with him. I gave him the ring. It was all I had to give. He went through the ice later, and I was alone in the shanty. That was where I worked out the blind beggar disguise while my wound was healing and I was getting my strength back. If I had shown myself Barnaby would have tried a second time. And I wanted revenge! I've just recently got strength enough for a stout blow . . . able to drag a ladder through the tunnel. I wanted to rise from the dead . . . for he never knew . . . that I wasn't down there!

"Ah, brother! I warned you . . . but I was ashamed . . . until I had punished Barnaby . . . taken our land back! I didn't want you to cheat me of my chance to redeem myself. I came tonight . . . to save you if I could. Noël, Barnaby never owned this land . . . more than an hour or two . . . that night. He never had a deed to the property."

John Potter's voice dropped away with the last words. He seemed content now to let go his false strength, his hold on life. He sank farther down in his chair. Noël's arm was around him. John looked with dimming eyes at Fay, and smiled.

"She'll grace this house," he whispered. "Good-by, brother!"

After a moment Noël Potter stood up. His glance fell upon Luke Thrall, and he knew that the man expected death. Luke's hands rubbed together and moisture glistened upon his puckered forehead.

"It all comes o' Barnaby's hoss a-tramplin' Mag Botts once!" the man muttered. "She put a curse on him then. I hearn her say it. But I didn't do nothing to her! I'll give ye good service, Mr. Noël—"

"Shut up!" growled Potter.

ALL at once he saw the cringing fear go from the face of Thrall; saw it light with an evil joy. A low cry came from Fay.

The two doorways of the room were filled with men. Fat Dick Wade was there, and Hoddy Prime with a bandaged nose; Tugger Blaw and Jake Garley. Over those in the dining room doorway towered Ahrent Perkins. There was a gloating promise of what was to come in the look he bent upon Potter.

"Where's Barnaby?" asked Perkins. "The wench come out and said they was something wrong. We was off ag'in for the lake when she caught me."

"Barnaby's dead," answered Luke, "and them two has to go the same way or we're all done for!"

"Down through the trap, Fay," said Noël, in a voice just above a whisper. He dared not fight here, with her in danger.

She sprang for the opening in the floor, and her feet were on the ladder as the doorways spewed men. Luke Thrall was already coming. Noël fired at him, and emptied his second pistol at Ahrent Perkins. He saw Luke pitch forward on his face; saw Perkins stumble against the wall with a hand pressed to his side. The others hesitated. Noël lifted the door, dropped to the ladder, and let the door fall behind him.

"Fay!" he called into the darkness.

"Here, Noël!"

He found her hand and plunged across the chamber, groping for the tunnel.

"Give me the pistols and go first,"

he said. "We've got a minute or two before they find this, and I doubt whether they know where it comes out."

Noël, creeping close behind Fay, guessed that they had traveled more than half the length of the curving passage when he heard the deadened sound of a shot at the opening of the tunnel. Let them shoot now. Let them burn powder at that distance. A few moments more, and beyond the dark outline of the girl ahead he caught the gleam of a star. Then they stood side by side among the alders, with the river at their feet. The night was still and filled with peace.

There would be long hours of riding now, to take Fay to safety and then to bring the sheriff and his men. Before dawn the house of Potter would be cleaned—and Noël's hands clenched eagerly at the thought of that process. It had been lost and won again in a night; and in a night it had come to its rightful owner. Noël saw the vista of the years to come, and it was good.

His hand found Fay's as they started swiftly along the river bank toward the road. Her head was very close to his shoulder. He looked down, and in the starlight he could see that her face was upturned to his.

"Yesterday I loved you," he said. "To-day there's no word to tell it."

"Yesterday I belonged to you," she whispered, "for this and all the other worlds. There's nothing more to say."

They stopped. Noël lifted her clear of the earth that he might hold her closer for a swift moment before they went on. The river sang. The stars rejoiced. Noël Potter had come home to his own.

THE END.

Bottle Prospectors

"I HEAR how old Jake struck a rich 'pocket' the other day," says one old desert rat.

"Well," replies another, a generation older, "he's welcome to it. Me, I don't have no truck with this new-fangled prospecting. It ain't decent."

Such a conversation might easily be heard in the haunts of Death Valley prospectors. Why? Because some of the old gold prospectors are backsliding. They have found that the bottles with which they have strewn the desert a few years ago now have a cash value. Not a few of the desert rats are scratching their heads and racking their memories, trying to recall this place or that place where they wasted a winter in search of gold. If they can only remember its location, they know they can go back there and come out with a bag full of empty bottles that will well repay them for the trip.

Not long ago it was found that bottles discarded on the desert a few years ago have changed to deep purple and beautiful amber. This has been brought about by the ultra-violet rays of the desert. Some of the bottles bring as high as five dollars; almost any of them is worth a dollar. Jewelers cut them up into beads; others are used as vases and lampstands.

Meantime, the prospectors have relocated at Ryolite, ghost city, where there is a choice assortment of discarded bottles left over from that mining town's heyday.

Harold J. Ashe.

"It's been a long time, Rosita," said Goober

The Trail of Deceit

Mexican intrigue and rangeland crookedness snare young Hal Austin and two newcomers, Goober Glendon and Johnny Wells, in a tangled mystery of the modern West

By W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Bluffer's Luck," "Me and Peewee, Ltd.," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

GOOBER GLENDON and his young partner Johnny Wells are riding toward the Keno range. In the next county, in Silver Bar, they hear a shooting affray, and see Sheriff Nolan come in with the gun of wild young Hal Austin, son of the owner of the Star A ranch near Keno. Hal, Nolan says, just shot a fellow puncher, Jigger Slade, in self-defense. Nolan has another Star A cowboy, Tommy Wilson, take the drunken Hal back home.

Goober, who was once a Ranger and Cattlemen's Association man, pockets the gun—and finds that it is clean, unfired despite the two empty shells in it!

Meantime Frank Austin, Hal's wealthy father, arrives on a visit of inspection. When Goober goes up to greet his former fellow-puncher, Austin barely remembers him—and Goober

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stalks away, boiling over at what money has done to a good cow-hand.

On the way to Keno City, the stage is held up and Austin, his wife and daughter Betty are robbed; one of the stick-up men spoke Spanish. Sheriff La Plante and Deputy "Smoky" Hill lose the trail.

In Indian Wells, between Keno City and the border, Hal Austin, going under an assumed name, has fallen in love with the beautiful Juana Diaz, whose mother, Rosita Diaz, keeps the inn.

Frank Austin, coming to Indian Wells with his foreman Cal Sands in search of Hal, sees Rosita and starts as if facing a ghost. On their return, Frank admits that the dead Slade had been a detective he employed to stop rustling from the Star A. Cal Sands, who has been reporting all Hal Austin's wildness to his father, quotes Nolan as saying that Slade had been shot in the back; and when Frank Austin shows he believes this, Hal flares up, swears he will kill Sands, and bids his father farewell.

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGE TANGLE.

"HAL'S gone back to the border!" said Austin stupidly to the foreman.

"The damn fool," Sands muttered.

Austin shut his jaw tightly, his eyes blinking rapidly. Then:

"Sands, are you sure Sheriff Nolan told the truth—that my Hal—"

"I think he did, Frank."

"That's awful! I can't tell his mother. She isn't the kind you can tell things like that. What on earth am I to do?" he demanded helplessly.

"Let him alone and he'll come to his senses."

"I suppose that is best; but it's a hell of a remedy in a case like this. Maybe he'll marry that Mexican girl. Cal, I've got to do something to get him out of this country."

"No, I don't believe Juana will marry him."

"Damn your beliefs; I've got to *know*."

"I'm no mind-reader," said Sands testily. "You've got to take a chance. If I'm any judge, Rosita Diaz ain't goin' to let Juana marry anybody—not yet."

"I hope not," Austin said fervently. "Well, I suppose we may as well go on. No use going back to Indian Wells."

"Not a bit," agreed Sands, and they went on toward Keno City.

A short distance farther on they met Goober Glendon and Johnny Wells. The old cowboy and his young companion merely nodded, as they rode past.

"Know either of them fellers?" asked Sands.

Austin nodded shortly. "The old one. He used to be down in this country a long time ago. His name is Glendon. Was with the Texas Rangers at one time, and later he was with the Cattle Association, I believe, and made a hit as a range detective."

"Still with the Association?" queried Sands casually.

"I don't think so."

"You might hire him to investigate."

"No," replied Austin emphatically. "Once is enough."

GOOBER GLENDON snorted audibly after they had passed, and Johnny grinned as he said, "You and Austin must 'a' been pretty thick in the old days."

"He's shore crazy about me now," Goober admitted grimly. "From what Smoky says, Austin is worried about rustlers adoptin' his stock. Let 'em! I hope some old cow kicks him flat on his back in a manure pile."

Johnny laughed softly. "Yore curses are pretty severe, Goober."

They rode on to Indian Wells. Goober had been there years before, and he failed to see where the place had advanced any. They saw Hal on the street, and both of them recognized him, although Hal had been too drunk to remember seeing them in Silver Bar.

Porfiro Mendez and his two cousins came swaggering down the narrow street, and Goober looked Mendez over thoughtfully. He had known "Lobo" Mendez years before, and recognized him, in spite of the fact that Mendez had grown from a wiry young *vaquero*, cow-puncher, to a hulking figure resplendent in gaudy clothes and silver.

Mendez looked keenly at the old cowboy for several moments, and his big mouth widened to a smile.

"*Madre de Dios!*" he exclaimed. "Señor Glendon, I'm bet your hat!"

"Hello there, Porfiro," laughed Goober. "You old son-of-a-gun!"

"Sonn off a gonn, eh?" laughed Mendez, as they shook hands. "W'ere you be all thees long time?"

"North most of the time: Oregon, Washington, Montana, Idaho."

"You leeve down 'ere now?"

"Nope; jist passin' through, kinda lookin' for a job."

"You not weeth Texas Ranger no more?"

"Not for a long time."

"Hm-m-m-m-m."

"How is the world treatin' you?" asked Goober.

"*Muy bien.* I'm beeg man in my own city. You come down see Piñon."

"The old town of Piñon, eh?"

"Ver' old, ver' nice. I am *alcalde* there."

"Justice, eh?" Goober laughed. "Featherin' yore own nest, Porfiro?"

"W'at you mean?"

"I guess you ain't runnin' no Sunday school."

Possibly Mendez did not know what Sunday school meant, but he evaded the issue anyway.

"Thees like ol' time," he said. "Today I'm see Frank Austin; now I'm see you."

"You remember Frank?"

"Sure; he's a relation from me."

"Yea-a-a-ah?"

"Sure. I'm marry one seester, he marry other seester."

"That's right. By golly, I forgot that. Your wife still alive?"

"I'm don' know; she *vamos* long time ago."

"Uh-huh? Mendez, I want yuh to meet Johnny Wells, my partner."

They shook hands, and Mendez turned to Mike and Dick Gonzales.

"Thees is my cousin, both of them, Miguel and Ricardo Gonzales. Bot' good man, but not brain enough to pour sand from rat-'ole. Shake 'ands."

That formality over, they went on. Goober laughed softly, as he and Johnny went on up the street.

"Fine trio of smugglers," said Goober. "Mendez, bein' *alcalde* of Piñon, it gives him a chance to run everythin' from drugs to diamonds across the line."

"What was that stuff about him and Austin bein' related?" asked Johnny.

"They married twin sisters—Mexican girls. Austin was still livin' with his Mexican wife when I left here, but it's a cinch he's made a change since then. I remember seein' Austin's wife, but I never knew what became of the

one Mendez married. How about foldin' ourselves around a little chuck?"

Goober stopped a prosperous-looking Mexican and asked him where there was a good place to eat.

"You like cheeken, ver' nice fry—good *vino?*"

"Shore," grinned Johnny.

The Mexican pointed out the Casa del Diaz, and they thanked him.

THEY went over and entered the place. Hal was sitting alone at a table in the patio, looking rather downcast.

As they sat down Rosita came in to take their order. Goober looked sharply at her, his brow furrowed in thought. She recognized him, and her eyes widened. Goober had not changed since the days when Rosita Diaz was a belle of Indian Wells. He started to speak her name, but hesitated. He had only known her as Mrs. Austin.

"Bring us some chicken and some wine," he said softly, and she turned away.

Juana came in through an outside entrance to the patio, carrying a bunch of roses, and Hal got quickly to his feet.

"I thought you go back to Keno City," she said.

"I came back to see you, Juana," he replied. "I want to see you alone."

She whispered something to him and he nodded quickly. She went on and entered another door. Goober looked at Johnny, a queer expression in his eyes.

"What's eatin' yuh?" asked Johnny softly.

Goober shook his head. Rosita came back with a bottle of wine. Hal got up and entered the *cantina.*

"It's been a long time since I seen you," said Goober softly.

He looked up at Rosita. Except for her luminous eyes, there was no change in expression.

"Many years, Señor Glendon," she murmured. "Years I would forget."

"Wasn't that Frank Austin's son?"

"Yes."

Goober's glass was too full, and he spilled some of it on the table.

"Frank Austin was your good friend," said Rosita softly, a catch in her voice.

"Not now. He has forgotten old friends. Money makes some men forget."

"Forget everything," breathed Rosita. "But that is past."

"You married again?"

"No, *señor.*"

"That girl—he called her Juana?"

Rosita's lips shut tightly for a moment and her eyes turned toward the doorway to the *cantina.*

"She is mine," she said firmly.

"Sure," said Goober slowly. "It is none of my business, *señora.*"

"*Gracias.* I will send the chicken."

She went away, leaving them alone in the patio, with the scolding parrots.

"What's it all about?" asked Johnny.

Goober shook his head sadly. "Tough deal, it looks like. Puttin' two and two together, it looks as though Hal Austin was in love with his half-sister, and none of 'em have nerve enough to tell him."

"Why in hell don't her mother tell him?"

"I dunno, Johnny. Mebbe she's got an ax to grind with Frank Austin."

"Why don't Austin tell his kid?"

"Ashamed—mebbe. I dunno. Anyway, it's none of our business, pardner."

"And that girl shore is a peach, Goober."

"Buy a cue in the game—she's half white."

"*Está la vida!*" screamed a parrot. "*Por Dios! Está la vida!*"

"'By God! This is the life,'" translated Goober. "Yo're right, Polly."

"Smart parrot," grinned Johnny. "Here comes the chicken."

CHAPTER VI.

CAL SANDS, FIXER.

"WELL, I ain't goin' to jist walk off the job and tell her to do her own damn cookin'—but I might as well."

Omaha sat on the chip pile, his old pipe sagging from one side of his mouth, and considered Tony Riecho and Dave Elkinson, two of the Star A cowboys.

"Yo're a fair cook," said Tony seriously.

"Fair—hell! I'm as good as they ever git. That there Austin woman don't know food, she don't. She says to me, 'Some cavyar for dinner, some thin soup, and I want the filly meyon rare.' Git that, will yuh, you damn dogie-dodgers? I dunno what she wants, but yuh say 'yes'm' when *she* talks, y'betcha. Then I sneaks around to Miss Betty, and I asks her what in hell is cavyar. Know what she said? 'Course yuh don't. She said it was feesh aigs."

"You lyin', Omaha?" asked Dave.

"Cross m' heart, and I hope to die. Feesh aigs! In this country?"

"I ain't never seen no fish eggs," said Tony. "I didn't even know they laid eggs. What kinda fish?"

"What's filly meyon?" asked Dave. "That's a new one on me."

"Sounds like horse meat," replied Omaha disgustedly. "Filly!"

"I've et horse meat," said Tony. "It ain't bad. But the question is—what are yuh goin' to cook for 'em?"

"Thin soup," sighed Omaha. "Imagine thin soup. I'll jist take some of my reg'lar soup and strain her through a flour sack."

"You better go find a fish nest," advised Dave. "I'll ask Cal about butcherin' that Wagonrod filly he bought last month. She's lame, anyway."

"Well, I ain't huntin' no feesh nests," declared Omaha, gathering up some wood. "I dunno what in hell them wimmin came here for, anyway. The girl is all right. What's an abysmal brute?"

"Somethin' to eat?" asked Dave.

"I dunno. Miss Betty said I was a abysmal brute for treatin' the steak the way I done."

"You do kinda leather 'em up," suggested Tony maliciously. "Where'd Cal and Austin go this mornin'?"

"Over to Silver Bar," Omaha told him. "The old lady is gettin' sore as hell. She wants to see Hal, and they don't seem to be able to find the danged fool. And she's still sore about bein' robbed. She says one of them diamonds was worth five thousand dollars."

"Which one?" asked Dave.

"How'd I know? I never got 'em. Well, I s'pose I better git back on the job. If you fellers happen to run onto a feesh nest—"

"Well, we might," grinned Tony. "You better ask Cal about that filly meat."

Mrs. Austin was both discouraged and disgusted. It was not what she had expected. The Star A ranch house had always been the abode of men. It lacked any refinements. The beds were hard, the food coarse. Betty did not

complain, but of course Betty was young, romantic. Perhaps the cowboys were handsome, in a rough way, but Mrs. Austin was long past the romantic age.

"Unwashed creatures," she called them. "Why, they do not even talk our language."

"Picturesque," sighed Betty, seated on the front steps, and trying to make friends with a pup, half wolf, half collie.

"Ignorant to the point of dumbness," declared her mother.

"Cal Sands is not ignorant, mother."

"Sinister, rather."

The pup ran away and squatted behind a bush, which was too small to hide it.

"Typical of the country," said Mrs. Austin, meaning the pup. "Do you notice his fear of us? And yet he has no fear of the cowboys. I suppose it is because they are all primitive."

Betty nodded slowly. "Primitive. I shouldn't be at all surprised to see one of the cowboys wearing one of our diamonds strung around his neck to keep away evil."

"He would be mightily disappointed in the efficacy of the charm," replied Mrs. Austin, with unconscious humor.

Betty laughed softly. "The value would probably not appeal to him. Perhaps he imagines he has a silver ring and a flat brilliant. Square-cut diamonds and platinum are seldom seen in this country."

MRS. AUSTIN sighed deeply. "Betty, what has gone wrong with your father?"

"Wrong?"

"Yes—wrong. And why doesn't he find Hal? It is ridiculous to think they cannot find him. He says it is because Hal did not know we were coming out here. But I haven't lived all these years with Frank Austin without knowing him. He is worried sick over something. If they do not find Hal in a very short time, I shall search for him myself."

"If dad and Cal Sands are unable to find him—" began Betty.

"But are they?" interrupted Mrs. Austin quickly. "They have gone back to Silver Bar to-day, presumably looking for Hal. Yesterday they were down at Indian Wells. To-morrow—where?"

"I do not believe there is anything to worry about," said Betty. "Hal is a man—not a little boy."

"Well, something is decidedly wrong," sighed Mrs. Austin. "This wretched place gets on my nerves. That ignorant cook! Oh, I could just scream at sight of his food. Beef cooked to a cinder, soapy-looking boiled potatoes, saffron biscuits."

"And," added Betty solemnly, "he admitted to me that he is the best chef in Arizona."

"Chef! That man is an incendiary. He doesn't even hold a good thought for raw food. But he is on a level with the rest of the place. No electricity, no gas, no plumbing. Baths are unknown. Look at your father. Must have a bath and a shave every day—now look at him."

"Reverting to form," smiled Betty. "You must remember, dad got his start in this environment."

"Did he?" snorted Mrs. Austin, who considered snorting the height of vulgarity.

"Didn't he, mother?"

"He came to San Francisco with a few head of cattle—and met me. If you mean, he came from down here—yes."

"I never heard about that," said Betty interestedly.

"I never considered it worth discussing."

"And you married daddy right then? How romantic! But didn't he ever come back down here?"

"After we were married he came down here for a few days to settle up his affairs."

"Daddy was a cowboy, was he not?"

"Yes, I suppose he was."

"And you have always been happy and prosperous."

"Just remember, young lady, we did not live happy and prosperous on what he could earn as a cowboy."

"Possibly not. But has he owned this ranch all those years?"

"Not at all. He purchased this ranch about ten years ago—against my wishes. He had an idea of retiring to a cattle ranch after a few years."

"Does he still feel that way about it, mother?"

"I suppose he does. But there will only be one retirement in the Austin family, I can assure you of that. I wouldn't live down here for all the cattle in Arizona."

"No," said Betty thoughtfully. "I was wondering who a certain cowboy might be. We met him down in Silver Bar—on the street. And again we saw him in Keno City, after the robbery. He was with an older cowboy. He had blue eyes and rather auburn hair—nice-looking cowboy."

"I did not notice him, because I am not interested in cowboys."

"He *was* nice-looking."

"Perhaps," Mrs. Austin said severely, "he is the one who took our rings."

"He didn't look like a criminal," Betty protested.

"Very few criminals do—until after they are caught," dryly. "However, we are not going to be here much longer. If your father feels that he must stay, all well and good—but I am not going to stay. I shall talk with him to-night, and in any case, we shall go to Silver Bar or Indian Wells not later than to-morrow evening, and take the first train back to San Francisco."

"Without seeing Hal?"

"It doesn't appear that Hal cares to see us."

"But surely, mother, he doesn't know we are here. Hal isn't that kind."

"Pshaw! Everybody knows we are down here."

"I am afraid not, mother. There are no newspapers to spread the news, and I do not believe the name of Austin means as much here as it does at home."

"Well," the bearer of that name stated resignedly, "that doesn't affect the situation in the least. We go home to-morrow."

IF Mrs. Austin was suffering from contact with the country, Frank Austin was also suffering, but in a different way. The knowledge that Hal had deliberately murdered a man was the greatest shock he had ever felt. It had been a bitter dose to swallow, but once down he blinked dazedly and wondered how it could be handled to insure complete concealment of the crime.

It was true that Nolan, the sheriff, because of Austin's prominence, had declared it a case of self-defense. But the coroner would know that the man had been shot in the back, and unless this man had been fixed by Nolan, there was always danger of a leak.

Austin asked Sands if he was personally acquainted with the coroner.

"Yeah, I know him," admitted the

foreman. "Name's Edwards. I don't know him very well, of course. He's the doctor of Silver Bar."

"And," said Austin miserably, "it is seldom that a man, shooting in self-defense, shoots a man in the back."

"That's true," nodded Sands. "I never thought of that."

"What about the inquest?" demanded Austin.

"That's right. We'll go over there to-morrow."

"I was just wondering," said Austin slowly, "if a little money would help to—you know what I mean."

"Yes," replied Sands quickly, "it might help a hell of a lot. Nolan is all right, I think, but I can't swear for the coroner."

"How much?"

Sands laughed shortly. "Well, I don't want anybody to hold yuh up on a deal like this, but—you make the amount to suit yourself."

"Will you help me handle the deal?" the moneyed man pleaded. "You know them better than I do, Cal. They probably wouldn't want checks. I can draw on the bank. Yes, I think it would be better than paying by check."

"Cash always looks better than a check—and yuh can't trace a dollar."

"That's it! We've got to be cautious, Cal."

So here they were, in Silver Bar, ostensibly looking for Hal. Austin drew five thousand dollars, split it in two parts, and gave it to Sands to buy silence from the sheriff and coroner. Sands came back and reported that all was well, but Austin sat out the coroner's inquest, perspiring at every pore during the testimony, especially when the doctor took the stand and testified that the deceased had died from the effect of two revolver bullets. But the doctor did not mention whether they had been fired from behind or in front.

The sheriff testified that the killer, known as Windy, a cowboy from the Flask River country, had fired in self-defense, became panicky and headed out of the country. The sheriff, having seen the shooting, did not bother to go after the man.

Austin left the inquest, shaky but relieved. There had been no mention of Hal Austin, for which Frank Austin was duly thankful, and for which he thanked Cal Sands profusely.

"That's all right," said the foreman. "The boys send their thanks for the money, and yuh don't need to worry about anythin'."

There had been two strangers at the inquest—Goober Glendon and Johnny Wells. No one seemed to notice them at the back of the room, until the inquest was over, when Sands and Sheriff Nolan saw them. Nolan's jaw hardened as he realized that Goober and Johnny had been in that saloon on the night of the shooting, and consequently had heard him say it was Hal Austin who did the shooting.

Nolan didn't know what these two might do; so he hunted around until he found Sands, and drew him aside, mentioning the presence of Goober and Johnny.

"I saw 'em," said Sands. "Glendon is an old friend of Austin; so that's all right."

"What are they doin' here, anyway, and who are they?"

"That's all I know about 'em. Glendon used to be a Texas Ranger, and he was afterward an Association detective. Kinda funny, at that. They're here the night of the shootin'. Next day there's a stage robbery, and these two were in Keno City when I got over there. Yesterday Austin and

me met them down near Indian Wells —and here they are in Silver Bar."

"Yeah," nodded Nolan, "and them two was in the saloon after the shootin', when I left Hal's gun on the card table. Well, I've never found that gun. I asked Wilson about it, but he never took it."

"They're both wearin' guns," Sands observed.

"Yeah, but did they take Hal's gun?"

"Hm-m-m-m-m. They might bear watchin', Nolan."

"Where's Hal?"

"Indian Wells, I reckon. Well, we've got to start home."

"How long are the Austin family goin' to stay with yuh?" the sheriff of Silver Bar asked.

"*Quién sabe?* Not long—if the old man ever has an understandin' with Hal. If I don't see yuh before, I'll be over to start the Austin family on their back trail."

GOOBER and Johnny were rather amused at the inquest, although they knew the sheriff would protect Hal in the matter.

"That sheriff is a born liar, Johnny," said Goober, when they were back on the street again. "He put the deadwood on some poor puncher that ain't ever been here, prob'ly. But it's all right. I'll betcha Austin knowed that Hal should have been present, even if it was self-defense. I could see the sweat on Austin's nose all durin' the meetin'."

They went up the street, sauntering slowly, and were passing the front of a bank, when some one called Goober's name. They stepped back and entered the bank, where a gray-haired man stepped from behind a grille gate and thrust out his hand to Goober.

"Ed Cates!" exclaimed the old cowboy. "By golly, how are yuh, Ed?"

"Goober Glendon, you old rascal!" They stood and grinned at each other for several moments.

"Banker, eh?" grunted Goober.

"Yeah," boomed the gray-haired Cates. "I've been here for years, Goober. I've often wondered what ever became of you."

"Well, I'll be darned!" Goober's eyes swept the little banking establishment. "Still, you allus was good at figgers, Ed. You ain't changed much. Hair's a little grayer than formerly, thasall."

"Same with you, pardner."

"Well, mebbe I shrunk a little. Kinda weatherbeaten, Ed. Oh, yeah, I forgot. Meet m' pardner, Ed. His name is Johnny Wells. Johnny, this here is one of my old friends, Ed Cates."

They smiled and shook hands.

"A different greetin' than Frank Austin gave yuh," observed Johnny.

"Ain't it?" Goober chuckled.

"What about Austin?" queried the banker, a twinkle in his eyes.

"Oh, he jist got kinda high-toned," grinned Goober. "Didn't remember me—much."

"I know. Frank is pretty rich these days, Goober. He was in to see me this morning."

"Yeah? Renewin' old acquaintances, Ed?"

"Well, I wouldn't quite put it that way. He cashed a check for five thousand dollars. Chicken-feed for him, I suppose."

"No brains," grinned Goober. "A couple enterprisin' boys knocked him off for a thousand dollars, and took a couple diamond rings from the wimmin. And now he lines his pockets with more *dinero* for 'em to get."

"I heard about that robbery. By the way, that was his wife and daughter, wasn't it? I saw them that morning. Nothing like that, when we knew him, eh, Goober? Wasn't he married to a Mexican woman?"

"Yeah."

"How did you happen to come back to this country, Goober?"

"Lookin' around. Me and Johnny teamed up down in Yuma. Johnny was thinkin' of joinin' the army to see the world. I asked him if he had seen all of this country, and he said he hadn't. I says, me and you better git used to Arizony before we start takin' in too much territory; so here we are."

A MAN came in to see Cates; a cattleman, possibly forty years of age, black hair, black eyes, a crooked nose. His lower lip sagged from a white scar, which bisected the lip and curled down across his chin. Cates called him Terrill. He looked sharply at Goober and their eyes met. Terrill's features did not change, but his eyes widened quickly, snapped almost shut, like a man who faces a flash light.

"I'll see yuh again, Ed," said Goober calmly.

"Be sure and do that, Goober. Glad to have met you, Wells."

"Thank yuh," said Johnny, and they walked out, going down to the front of the hotel.

"You knowed that feller Terrill," said Johnny.

"Knowed him?" Goober snorted. "Of course I knowed him. Notice that lip? I done that with the barrel of a six-gun, the dirty sidewinder. Terrill, hell! His name is Bart Walker. Now, what's he doin' up here, wearin' the name of Terrill?"

"Killer?" asked Johnny.

"Shore 'nough. Had his own gang down near Laredo—four of 'em. I had 'em dead to rights one time. Walker played dead, until my gun was empty, and then tried to take me alive. I'd been hit twice, but I had three of his men down and one gone out through a winder, when up gits Walker, coverin' me with his gun; so I flung mine at him and knocked him cold. I seen him down, with the blood spurtin' from his lip and chin, and then I went out. But Walker got away, prob'ly thinkin' I was dead."

"Wanted to take yuh alive an' kickin' did he?"

"Yeah, sacrificed his own men for a chance to cut off my ears, I s'pose. I'd shore like to know what he's doin' around here."

"He'll probably pull out now that you recognized him."

"Not that *malo hombre.*"

Discreet questioning at one of the bars brought out the fact that Terrill owned the 7 Bar 7 cattle outfit, located about five miles northwest of Silver Bar, near the road to Keno City. He had owned it about three years, and hired two cowboys. It seemed that Terrill was well liked and minded his own business.

"That's all right," Goober told Johnny. "If he's on the square, I'd be the last one to annoy him. Ain't none of us old-timers but what lives in glass houses. But jussasame, I keep my eye peeled on Bart Walker."

"Is he wanted anywhere, Goober?"

"No, I don't reckon he is. Men ain't usually 'wanted' down in that country. They either git out or git planted. Walker got out. Of course, I dunno where he's been since that time, except the three years he's been around here."

Seated at the window of the hotel lobby, they saw Terrill cross the street

from the bank, mount his horse, and ride out of town.

CHAPTER VII.

TROUBLE ROOSTS AT THE STAR A.

AUSTIN'S heart was lighter as he and Sands rode back to Keno City. As far as the death of Slade was concerned, everything was all right. Sands had handled things well, and Austin was grateful to the tall foreman.

"If we can only fix things to get Hal back home, everything will be fine," he told Sands. "I made you a proposition yesterday, if you remember. I said I'd give you half interest in the Star A, if you married Juana Diaz. Now, I'll go further than that, Cal. To-morrow we'll go to a lawyer in Keno City and draw up partnership papers. After to-morrow, you own half of the Star A. No, don't say a word," when Sands started to speak. "I don't want any thanks. I need you there. I can't take any active part in the handling of the ranch. Things are in pretty much of a mess—rustling and all that."

"That's a pretty big gift," said Sands slowly.

"All right. Stop all this rustling. It's your stock as well as mine now."

"I've done all I could."

"Oh, I know that. I'm not accusing you of negligence, Cal. But I wish Slade had lived long enough to tell me what he knew."

"Did he know anythin'?"

"Perhaps."

They found that Hal had not come back to Keno City; so they went on to the ranch. Austin had hoped against hope that Hal had relented and gone to the ranch to see his mother and sister, but Hal had not been there.

"Either Hal does not know we are in this country, or something terrible has happened to him," declared Mrs. Austin, after her husband had told her they could not find Hal.

"I don't think he knows we are here," lied Austin wearily. If he could only induce Hal to go back to San Francisco and let them find him there, it would clear up everything.

"I shall search for him myself to-morrow," declared Mrs. Austin. "I shall enlist the assistance of the sheriff's office, and if he is in this—"

"No, I wouldn't do that," said Austin quickly. "I—I'll find him. As soon as he finds we are here he will come to the ranch."

"Why did he leave here in the first place? You do not know? I do."

"You do?"

"He quarreled with Cal Sands over that Mexican girl. Sands tried to prevent Hal from seeing her, because Sands is in love with her himself."

"Ridiculous! Sands doesn't love that girl."

"I suppose he told you he doesn't."

"Who told you all this?"

"That," said Mrs. Austin firmly, "is a confidential report. Hal refused to take orders from Sands."

"Sands didn't want Hal to throw himself away on a Mexican girl. He felt responsible to me."

"Very considerate, I'm sure. But have you seen this Mexican girl?"

Austin hesitated, but decided to admit that he had seen Juana. "Yes, I have seen her."

"Pretty?" demanded his wife.

Austin shrugged his shoulders.

"Pretty enough, I suppose—if you care for that type of beauty."

"So Omaha, the cook, said."

"You got all your information from Omaha, eh?"

"He answered a few questions," Mrs. Austin snapped.

"I believe Sands would be interested in knowing that the cook is a gossip."

"I know I was," she smiled. "He told me many things, and among them was the fact that Slade, the man who was killed in Silver Bar, was a detective sent here by you."

"How in hell did Omaha know that?" blurted Austin. "That is something I must find out."

"I asked him how he knew, and he said Slade talked in his sleep."

"Talked in his sleep!"

"Some folks do, Frank. You have."

He jumped. "I have? What did I say?"

"Many times. Last night, for instance, you were babbling about somebody shooting their half-sister in the back. Not an intelligent statement, but it shows what might happen."

Austin mopped his brow with a handkerchief. This was serious. Betty came in and Austin sighed with relief.

"NO news of Hal?" queried Betty, and her father shook his head. "Is he hiding from us, dad?"

"Why, no, of course not. He just don't know we are here. He hasn't been in Silver Bar nor Keno City lately."

"Then he must be in Indian Wells. Mother, did you tell dad what we had decided to do?"

"No, I had not mentioned it yet."

"What was that?" the official head of the household inquired anxiously.

"This place is unbearable," said Mrs. Austin. "The food is terrible and the sleeping accommodations vile. Tomorrow we are going to Indian Wells and find Hal. After a talk with him, we are taking a night train for home. That is my decision."

"But, my dear, that doesn't give me any time—"

"You may stay, if you care to be uncomfortable; we do not."

"But I wish you would not be too hasty. You—you may not find Hal in Indian Wells, and you would surely not want to go home without seeing him. Perhaps he will be in Keno City or Silver Bar to-morrow. I'll try and find him. I'm sure he will come here as soon as he knows."

"We shall go to Indian Wells tomorrow, Frank."

"But suppose you do not find him? Would you go back without seeing him?"

"Certainly. Hal would understand."

"Well, perhaps it would be better if you and Betty went back," Austin said lamely.

"You do? Hm-m-m-m-m. I'm not so sure of that."

"Do as you please, my dear," her husband offered wearily. "But I must stay a while. There are certain things that must be cleared up."

Austin left the house and met Sands at the stable. He told Sands that old Omaha had told Mrs. Austin a lot of things, among them the fact that Slade was a cattle detective.

"How in hell did Omaha know this?" snorted Sands. "I didn't."

"He said Slade talked in his sleep."

"I wonder why Omaha didn't tell me?"

"I don't know. He also told her that the reason Hal wouldn't stay here was because you and Hal quarreled over that Mexican girl."

Sands flushed angrily. He knew this to be the truth, but was eager to deny it.

"That blasted old liar! I'll tie a can on him so tight that he won't get an-

other job in this county. Anyway, he can't cook."

"Do as you please about that. Mrs. Austin has made up her mind to go to Indian Wells to-morrow, find Hal if possible, and leave for home from there."

"She and Betty?"

"Yes."

"Well, it might be a good idea, at that, Frank."

"Best in the world—if only they don't find Hal. That fool kid might talk too much, thinking they already know what he does. If we can only find Hal and keep him under cover until they leave."

"They'd probably find him at the Casa del Diaz."

"We can't let them do that, Cal. I've got to keep my wife—"

Austin broke off the sentence quickly. He had not meant to say what was in his mind. Sands was looking at him curiously. Austin mopped his flushed face with a handkerchief.

"Suppose she did go to the Casa del Diaz?" queried Sands.

AUSTIN sat down wearily on an old box, staring ahead. Should he tell Sands, he wondered? Sands was to be his partner in the Star A. He trusted Sands. Why not tell him the truth? Possibly Sands suspected something already.

"You recognized Rosita Diaz," Sands was saying, as Austin looked up.

"She was my wife years ago," said Austin thickly. "Juana is my daughter. Now, do you understand?"

"For God's sake!" exclaimed Sands.

"God hasn't anything to do with it, Cal; it's a devil's mixture. My own son is in love with my own daughter, and I—I don't dare— I left Rosita. There was no divorce. Rosita is a Catholic. I knew there was a baby coming, but I went away. I'd been to San Francisco with some cattle, and I met Laura—my present wife. I haven't any excuse, except that— Oh, what's the use?"

"Would Rosita let Juana marry Hal?" asked Sands slowly.

"Who knows? I left her destitute. Perhaps this might be her way of getting revenge."

"But her own daughter!"

"Is she—does she seem to be doing anything to prevent it?"

"No, that's true as hell—she ain't."

"And I can't tell Laura that this Mexican woman was my wife—that Juana is my daughter. Don't you see what it would mean?"

"It shore is a mess," agreed Sands thoughtfully. "We've got to find a way out. I never thought it was that bad."

"I didn't know, until I saw Rosita. I just didn't want Hal to marry a Mexican girl. If we can only get Laura and Betty out of the country! That's what we've got to do—get 'em away."

Omaha was hammering on the old circular saw which hung on the back porch in lieu of a dinner bell, calling them to supper.

"Hammer it plenty," thought Sands. "To-morrow you go down the road." But aloud he said: "I'm takin' a ride to-night, Frank, and I may not be back until mornin'. I'll stop in Keno City and have Charley Bell fix up them papers, if you'll give me the dope on what yuh want in 'em."

"All right, I'll do that. Are you going to Indian Wells, Cal?"

"I think I will. I want to get a line on Hal, and see if I can't figure out some way to get him out of Indian Wells for a while."

"Good; I'll leave it to you. Let's go and eat."

CHAPTER VIII.

NIGHT AMBUSH.

GOOBER and Johnny spent the day around Silver Bar. They heard that Austin was paying the expenses of shipping Slade's body back to San Francisco. The big sheriff was pleasant enough when they talked with him at his office, and Nolan admitted that the truth had been handled carelessly at the inquest.

"No use puttin' the deadwood on Austin's kid," he told them, "even if it was self-defense. Least said, soonest mended. That's the way I look at it. The kid was drunk. You both seen him."

"Shore," nodded Goober.

"You used to know Austin, didn't yuh?"

"Used to," grinned Goober. "He used to know me, too. Where does the Star A do their shippin' from?"

"Indian Wells."

"Much stock shipped from here?"

"Oh, quite a little."

Goober stretched and filled his pipe.

"I heard quite a lot about the Star A losin' cattle and horses, when we was over in Keno City."

"I've heard the same thing," nodded the sheriff. "Don't seem possible. They'd have to drive 'em north, south, or over here, and you've got to have the local officer look 'em over before they're shipped. No chance to ship other brands, unless yuh can damn sure prove ownership."

"I know that," drawled Goober. "How about Mexico?"

"Horses, yeah, yuh might sell a few down there. No market for cows. They sell most of their surplus across the line. Sands said they was losin' a few head—enough to worry Austin. But you *sabe* all this stuff because you used to work for the Association, I hear."

"Yeah, I did," replied Goober, wondering who had told Nolan. "But I got out of that kinda work. Too dangerous for the money yuh git. Might as well be a sheriff or a deputy."

Nolan laughed. "Oh, this ain't bad. I don't hire any deputy. Used to have one. Pretty hard to get reliable men at the money this county can pay; so I handle the job alone."

"And don't git anythin' extra for doin' it," said Goober.

"No, that's plenty true. Are you fellers lookin' for work around here?"

"Well, that was our original idea," grinned Goober. "We heard about Frank Austin ownin' a big outfit over here; so we comes over to have a look. I tells Johnny that Austin bein' an old blanket-mate of mine, we'd shore get a couple of jobs. I meets Frank here the day he showed up, and you'd think I was all broke out with smallpox."

Nolan laughed heartily. "Forgot his old friend, eh? That's what money does to some folks. You didn't strike Sands for a job, didja?"

"Hell, no! After that turn-down, me and Johnny decided to kinda look the places over. Not bein' exactly broke, we could afford to loaf a while."

"What about that 7 Bar 7 outfit?" asked Johnny.

"Terrill's? Oh, that's jist a little outfit. He hires a couple men, and they've been with him a long time. Dug Blewett and Heinie Shafer, couple old cow trailers. Terrill's ranch is kinda northwest of here. His road forks off the main road to Keno City, about a mile and a half from here."

Nolan ate supper with them and

loafed around with them until after nine o'clock. Things were quiet, only one or two games running.

"Might as well go down to the office and talk," the sheriff suggested at last; so they did. Nolan was interested in Goober's experiences along the border, but the old cowboy was rather reticent about his personal prowess.

"You was with the Association quite a while, wasn't yuh?" asked Nolan.

"Three years."

"Man on that job can make a lot of enemies in three years."

"That's right, and that's why I quit. Gittin' old, I reckon. Young feller goes hell-bent into things, takin' a lot of chances, but when yuh git older yore life seems worth more than a lot of fool happenings. I've stopped a plenty lead. The Walker gang tagged me for the cemetery, but I missed the sexton by an inch. Bart Walker was a queer sort of a jasper. He had a good chance to finish me off cold, but he wanted me alive. Played dead, until my gun was empty, and then raised up to take me alive. I knocked him cold with my six-gun, and then faded out m'self. I reckon Walker thought I was dead, because he got away, and I dunno what became of him."

Both Goober and Johnny watched Nolan's expression, but the big sheriff either did not know Terrill as Walker, or he had a perfect poker face. They talked for an hour, and Goober decided it was time to go to bed. They told Nolan good night and walked up the narrow sidewalk toward the hotel.

THEN it came, like a flash of lightning out of a clear sky. A streak of fire, the smashing report of a heavy revolver; Goober's grunt from the shock of the bullet, and his fall against Johnny Wells. Some one in a dark alley had fired, from not over fifteen feet away, and now was running down the alley, boots thumping on the hard ground.

Goober slithered down Johnny's right leg, and Johnny was shooting down the alley as fast as he could pull the trigger, cursing bitterly. The sheriff was running up the street, and men were coming from the saloon across the way. Johnny's gun was empty, the hammer clicking on an empty shell.

"He got Goober," said Johnny. "Damn him, he got Goober!"

"Who got him?" panted the sheriff.

"Man in the alley, the dirty bushwhacker."

"Didja hit him, do yuh think?" asked one of the men.

"No," groaned Johnny. "Shootin' at the sound, thasall. Git a doctor, will yuh? Goober, are yuh bad hurt?"

"Pack him into my office," ordered the sheriff.

They stretched Goober on the floor and one of the men ran to get a doctor. Goober's breathing could be heard out on the street, like a man suffering from pneumonia.

"Well, where did he get hit?" wondered Johnny. "I can't find no blood."

"Look at that belt-buckle," said a cowboy.

Goober was wearing an old army belt-buckle of solid metal, a big, oblong buckle, and to all appearances it had been hit hard.

Johnny unbuckled the belt, tore open Goober's clothes to disclose a purple bruise a little larger than the buckle.

"The luck of the Irish!" snorted Johnny in quick reaction.

Goober groaned, took a couple of deep breaths, and opened his eyes, squinting painfully.

"Where'd he hit me?" Goober asked.

"Right in the belt-buckle," grinned his relieved partner. "I've always wondered why yuh wore a monstrosity like that, but now I know."

Goober grunted painfully and sat up. "I feel like I'd been kicked by a horse," he told them. "My gosh, I'm shore tender."

He got to his feet and was feeling himself over, as the doctor came bustling in.

"Where's the wounded man?" he asked.

"He don't need a doctor," said Johnny. "Send a jeweler."

Nolan explained what had happened, and the doctor examined the bruise on Goober's body.

"That's all right. Be sore for a few days. Must have knocked the breath out of you."

"I reckon so," grinned Goober. "I thought the town fell down on me."

There was no use asking questions as to who had tried to kill the old cowboy. Goober carried his belt in his hand, and they went to the hotel. They went up to their room, down the rear steps, and around to the livery stable, where they saddled their horses.

"Got a hunch?" asked Johnny.

"Terrill-Walker, mebbyso. We'll go out and see what it looks like around his place. He's the only man I know of around here that would try to bush me thataway. Anyway, I crave a word or two with Mr. Terrill."

Not even the stableman saw them leave. He was probably at a saloon or restaurant. Their only knowledge of the way to the 7 Bar 7 was that the road forked off the Keno City road a mile and a half from Silver Bar. They circled wide of the town and picked up the road in the moonlight. It was an easy matter to find the road to the 7 Bar 7, and they were about a mile from the forks when they heard a horse clattering over a hard piece of road behind them. Swinging quickly off the road and into the brush, they saw a rider sweep past them. Even in the moonlight there was no chance to identify him.

"Ten to one it's Terrill," grunted Goober, as they went back to the road.

They rode slowly, after covering what seemed to be the approximate distance to the 7 Bar 7, and they saw the light from a window. Another quarter of a mile and they could see the huddle of buildings, which constituted the ranch.

THEY dismounted in the shadow of the big stable, which screened their horses from any one on the road, and proceeded Indian-like to investigate. The ranch house was a one-story affair, and behind it was a small bunk house and a row of long sheds. A series of corrals linked the stable with these sheds. There was a light in the bunk house, and the window was apparently uncurtained, but a curtained window, through which the light shone dimly, precluded any chance to see inside the ranch house.

They cautiously circled the ranch house and came around to the bunk house, where they looked through a rear window. Two cowboys were at a little table, playing cribbage by a smoky oil lamp.

They were a hard-looking pair, these two 7 Bar 7 cowboys.

"Know either of 'em?" whispered Johnny.

"No," replied Goober, as they moved away.

A horseman was approaching the ranch house, and the two men dropped in the heavy shadow. They heard the man climb the porch steps and his

knock on the door. Goober sneaked in close to the window to see if he could hear what was being said in there, but the voices were not audible. It was too dark to distinguish the color of the horse, and Goober did not want to take a chance on going close to the animal.

He went back to Johnny, and they squatted in the shadow of the stable.

"If Terrill bushed you, and if Terrill was the man who passed us, he got out of town without knowin' whether he killed yuh or not," said Johnny. "My guess is that this other rider came out to tell him what happened."

"Yo're learnin', son," said Goober seriously. "After while you'll be able to look in a horse's mouth and tell how old he is."

"Well, what's yore wrong idea of it all, Goober?"

"The fact that he missed killin' me wouldn't cause a man to ride all the way out here to tell him what a rotten shot he is."

"Why not? Terrill knows you recognized him as Walker. And he might like awful well to know whether yo're alive or dead. It might make a lot of difference in what he does next."

"Yeah, that's right. Mebbe you've hit it. I shore wish I knew who this last feller is, Johnny. Walker is a human lobo, but I can't tag anybody else. Them two punchers of his shore look forked, but yuh can't go by looks."

"How does yore stummick feel?"

"Sore as a boil. Hurts me to bend over. But I ought to declare a Thanksgivin' Day and build me a idol out of that old buckle. I've worn that old thing for years, and I never knew why. But I know now."

"Fate," said Johnny. "If I—"

The thud of a shot prevented Johnny from finishing his statement. Just one shot, and it sounded as though it came from the ranch house. Suddenly the door was flung open and a man darted quickly down the steps. The horse snorted with fright, but the man was into the saddle and running his horse back to the main road.

The bunk house door was open and the two 7 Bar 7 hands came running toward the house.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

A Costly Beefsteak

PROBABLY the highest price ever paid for a beefsteak was the one paid for the first steak that reached Circle City, Alaska, a mining town that sprang up almost overnight during the excitement of the Klondike gold rush. This steak, a ten-pound one, sold for four hundred and eighty dollars. It was shipped from a point two hundred and fifty miles away. And when it first arrived the miners turned out in a body to see it. Placed on exhibition, the beefsteak attracted as much attention as a circus parade. Everybody wanted a piece of it. Bids, ranging from five dollars to thirty-five dollars a pound, were immediately offered for it.

Finally, to avoid a riot among the miners, it was decided to sell tickets on the steak, the lucky-numbered tickets being good for one slice of beefsteak. Four hundred and eighty dollars' worth of these tickets were sold, and although not every one got a piece of steak, there was no trouble, which was very fortunate for those in charge. *E. W. Mayo.*

That black was fighting like seven devils

The Little Gold Dove of Gojjam

In the unknown mountains of Abyssinia, the savage Christian kingdom in Africa's black heart, two naturalists venture on a mad quest

By THEODORE ROSCOE

AFRICA lay to starboard—a tenuous, blue-black line etched sharply below the moon. A warm night breeze, freighted with a fragrance queer and heady, drifted across the luminous water. The breeze and the low tropic stars and the land beyond were enough to make us forget our presence aboard this steamer forcing its way through the Gateway to the East. Bradshaw joined us where we stood enchanted at the ship's rail; but we did not know the naturalist was there until he spoke.

"There's an old Arab proverb," he chuckled, suddenly touching my arm, "that says this: Believe half of what you hear of Africa and nothing of what you see." He pointed over the rail with his pipe-stem. "I'm inclined to think that adage was written particularly for that bit of Africa lying yonder. The parcel of country just behind those coastwise hills. Know the

land I mean? I'm speaking of Abyssinia."

He fixed the shoreline with a dreamy gaze while his lean fingers stoked his pipe with that tobacco he insisted on smoking. I caught a hint of cognac as he breathed, and I knew his tone. There would be a story forthcoming if the young British consular agent standing with me didn't say something fatuous and shut the naturalist up. The young consular agent was "going out" for the first time. He hadn't been down this Red Sea before, and he didn't know the naturalist as I did.

"Abyssinia!" I urged. And in all truth the name of that little-explored kingdom had trapped my interest. "I say, Bradshaw—never knew you'd traveled in there. You've poked into every other God-forgotten spot on the globe, but you never mentioned Abyssinia before."

"It's the weirdest country in all the world!" He blew a ribbon of white smoke, and paused to watch it unfold. "Strangest land going, and least known. There it lies, landlocked behind those mountains; fenced in by Italian Eritrea and French Somaliland. Dinky railroad running from the French chunk of coast to her capital is her only modern touch. Old? The rulers of that black Ethiopian kingdom date back in unbroken line to the Queen of Sheba. And the country hasn't changed its ways since Bible times. No gentle kingdom, either. Italy tried to grab it off in 1896 and the Abyssinians smashed the force from Rome into a million pieces. Foreigners keep out of there. And if they don't, they should."

He turned on me with an abrupt gesture. "I *was* in there a few years ago. I say! Haven't I ever told you about the little gold dove of Gojjam? No? Well, I don't tell the story very often. Too few people would believe. They haven't seen Abyssinia. It's the strangest land in the world, I tell you, and this story is stranger yet. I wouldn't tell it now, if the moon wasn't up..."

But the moon was up. So he balanced against the rail and worked his pipe and began:

TUPPER was your typical Englishman. He had light hair, decent blue eyes, a short nose and a businesslike jaw. Believed in tea, tweeds, the king and God. If his father hadn't been a rector in some polite London parish, this thing might never have happened. But John Tupper had been brought up on theology from Genesis to Revelation, and I guess he'd had a trifle too much of it.

He was religious enough, you understand, but he was a little fed up on the subject, time he reached twenty-five; so instead of following his father's expectations and going out as a missionary, he got drunk one day and landed a job as a naturalist.

The Paris outfit took him on; and first thing I knew, a young Britisher by the name of John Tupper walked down the gangplank at Jibouti to shake me by the hand.

He had been sent down to go with me as my assistant on a trek into the heart of Abyssinia.

I sized him up as a good lad; and we started out. We were to railroad from Jibouti into Abyssinia to Addis Abbaba, the capital. From there we were to trek into the hinterland mountains after specimens. Rare specimens. And those Abyssinian mountains are the places to find rare specimens, don't forget it.

Maybe you've heard of those hills. The ancient geographers called them

the Mountains of the Moon, and said you could find unicorns and werewolves and dragons in there by the carload. I didn't doubt it at all when we got into those hills. I've seen some lonely corners of the unknown in my day, but never a region as desolate as that. Here was the place where the ghosts of the universe gathered for their family reunions. The jumping-off place of the world. The north and south polar regions are roaring Times Squares compared to those Mountains of the Moon.

Now the *Jardin des Plantes* in Paris was hiring our time and energy. Wanted us to bring back a few dog-faced baboons, a colobus monkey, couple of cheetahs and koodoo antelopes, an ant-eater, one of those rare gazelles known as a nyala, and the rarest specimen of all, a certain yellow dove. And those exacting directors of the *Jardin* wanted something else. They wanted me to find some trace of Camille Caillard.

That yellow-winged dove was going to be hard to find; but if I knew anything about it, a trace of Camille Caillard was going to be harder to locate than a dodo. Perhaps you remember reading about Caillard in the papers. Caillard was that collector who brought back from Nepal the first armored rhinoceros ever seen. The world's greatest genius as a naturalist.

The *Jardin* had sent him into Abyssinia in those dangerous days before the Italian-Ethiopian War, and he had never come out. For two years the *Jardin* thought nothing of it. Caillard was a queer one, I say. Genius. He'd given up a wealthy business as one of Avignon's leading goldsmiths to indulge his passion for collecting. He would rave about a nice exhibit of taxidermy and he was in his seventh heaven when surrounded by unusual specimens. He was just the man to vanish into the unknown and turn up from nowhere after months of silence.

But after he'd been gone three years in Abyssinia, the zoölogical gardens began to worry. They sent a French emissary. He trailed Caillard to the Mountains of the Moon, then lost the track. Fifteen years had now elapsed. I was to pick up the trail if I could, as a sort of side-issue.

Well, young Tupper and I started our *safari* for the mountains without mishap. We had a good *safari.* Our boys were a wild-looking lot, wrapped in their white *chammas*, carrying shields and spears. Our guide was an Abyssinian noble, black as ink, gorgeously robed. We looked like a caravan procession out of the Middle Ages as we wound down the trail, and the ancient castles we'd occasionally pass helped out the picture.

Things went well. The fourth day out we had captured most of our prizes. We had our ant-eater, cheetahs, baboons, monkey and koodoo antelopes. All we lacked was the rare nyala and the yellow dove and any trace of Camille Caillard.

WHEN we reached the foothills of those Mountains of the Moon, I knew Caillard was dead and gone. We had ridden into that part of the mountains where the Blue Nile rises, known as Gojjam. A wild land of arid hills, barren watercourses, steep escarpments, hot ragged cliffs and crags.

No spark of civilization had ever floated down the blazing sky that blistered the landscape. Jackals and hyenas roved the stony slopes and starved. Now and then we'd meet a tar-black, devil-looking horseman who'd wave a poisoned lance at us and

ride off down the cliffs like a goat and make us mighty glad of the Webley pistols in our belts.

"There are ten thousand ways to die in these hills," I told Tupper. "Lions and sunstrokes and bandits and starvation. It would be mighty hard to track a man gone two days in this *cul-de-sac* of ravines; and Caillard has been gone fifteen years. Our guide promises me the man is dead. Even his bones are gone by now. We'll forget him and try to get hold of a nyala and that infernally rare dove."

We'd been riding down the rim of a cliff that was like an oven-lid in the blazing morning sun, and Tupper was tinkering with his binoculars. Just as I spoke he jumped in his saddle and got me by the arm.

"There's your nyala now," he barked. Sure enough. He'd spotted the beast bounding down the valley below. And off we went, helter-skelter.

I don't know how it happened. I guess Tupper and I rode the fastest ponies of the lot; and we had to speed like the devil if we wanted to get our hands on that gazelle. Our Abyssinian guide pounded along behind us, but we outdistanced him in no time. That nyala gazelle was covering ground like a ghost running before daylight, and we spurred our horses to the utmost.

Our prize fled up one ravine and down another, bounced along a crooked cañon and into a maze of arroyos, and, like the tinkling fools we were, Tupper and I raced after.

I think it was the hollow echo of the hoofbeats that finally brought me up with a jerk. I got a nice little shock when I realized our guide had dropped out of the picture, and I yelled to Tupper, telling him to stop. He'd lost sight of his confounded nyala, anyway, and he reined in with a grin.

"Nothing to grin about," I told him sourly, fanning with my helmet. "We left our guide somewhere behind, and we'd better find him quick. We'd be needles in a haystack if we ever got lost in these mountains."

Tupper chuckled and scrubbed at a sunburned nose. "I say, Bradshaw—lost? Lost in Abyssinia! What a blooming e x c i t i n g adventure that would be. You could write a book about it, what?"

"You could write a murder yarn if you pull any more smart remarks like that," I rasped. "Nice adventure, eh? Let me tell you, the man who's lost his way in these hills is out of luck. Why, half of these mountains are unexplored, unmapped. You saw those lions roaming around yesterday, and those black tribesmen who came to camp. Nothing to joke with. We'll fire a few shots right now to bring that guide along."

Tupper was game enough and had proved a clever rifle-shot and a companionable assistant, but he lacked experience. He'd never trailed into hinterland mountains before, and he took a grin on a native's face to mean friendship. One of those stanch Britons who believed the Union Jack would shadow him into any corner of the world.

I knew something else. It's a scary business, dropping over the edge of the world into some unknown African range. Those Abyssinians might have been converted Christians, but they looked to me like lads who'd cut your throat to get your sun helmet.

So I fired my rifle to bring the guide, and the echoing shots brought nothing but a bevy of buzzards. I didn't like the looks of it. I turned my horse and made for the trail back.

In five minutes I knew I couldn't

find the trail back. Then we rode. We topped ridges and played lookout. We fired signal-shots. We galloped up one hill and down another. Then we stood on a cliff buttress for an hour, firing at intervals. The echoes died away in the cañon below. The sun reached its zenith and destroyed every vestige of shade and the last of my good humor. And not a trace of our *safari* could be seen. We were lost.

IF you think I didn't do some first-class cussing you're wrong. I cussed the broiling sun, the silence, the guide for being deaf. I could have kicked myself purple for catapulting after that gazelle. Even Tupper was getting uneasy. We rode down the valley; and every mile the mountains got bigger and we got smaller and the silence thick as cotton.

The sun started to climb down out of the sky and the mountains turned from scarlet to dull red. Lonely? It was so lonely you found yourself talking in whispers and darting nervous glances over your shoulder. Every step our mounts took seemed to trap them deeper in that puzzle of crags and cañons.

No living thing seemed to inhabit that valley. Even the jackals weren't to be seen. The silence poured from the sky and up out of the rocks, and we couldn't seem to break it by firing our rifles. Those gun-shots sounded like twigs snapping against the vast escarpments of stone. The cliffs towered like castles against the metal sky, and the winds that played between them were gusts of a smelter furnace.

"This is hell," Tupper suggested, waving his gun. "I'll be fried to a cinder by the sun in another hour. And a human voice would sound mighty good to me, too, I'll—"

A human voice! The words weren't out of his mouth when we heard the scream. What a scream! It split through that mountain quiet as a gun-shot never could, and it sat us stiff in saddle with the hair prickling on our necks. Again the ghastly cry bit into the silence and echoed soprano among the crags. It seemed to come from just beyond a steep ridge; it conveyed the very essence of terror; and it made the sweat boil out on my face. A banshee wail if I ever heard one.

Tupper forced the words from a mouth full of dough. "Good God, what was that?"

I answered by spurring up the ridge.

WHAT we saw drove the breath from our lungs, I can tell you that. The slope tilted down to a little bowl-like valley, and in this valley a big black man and an enormous tawny lion were fighting.

It was the black man who was letting out those awful screams, and no wonder. The lion had its teeth in the man's left shoulder, its fore paws on his chest, its hind feet madly trying to claw the black's middle. From the looks of things the lion had just made its spring; by a miracle it had missed its mark at the victim's throat. And, armed with a knife only, that black was fighting like seven devils. Locked together in a death clutch, man and beast rolled on a mat of blood, scattering a vermilion shower.

I shot from the saddle, which was lucky, for the black man was almost gone. The lion went limp, and the shrieking native dragged free his mangled body and lay naked and bleeding on the stones. Tupper and I got to his side in a big hurry, and the minute I got a real look at him I knew he was done for.

We couldn't do anything but drag him into the shade of a giant bowlder; and Tupper touched a water-bottle to his writhing lips. And then we got a surprise. That Abyssinian rolled his eyes up at us and shoved the word out of his grinding teeth. "Thanks!"

"You speak English!" I said in astonishment.

"Yes." He panted and moved his head.

"Where did you come from," I marveled.

He juggled his bloodied hand. "Many years ago—me—went America. New York. Shine shoes. Get money. Come back. Fight for King Menelik. Me—Abyssinian. Name Mefwik. You kill lion—save—my life—"

There he lay in the cheerless, hot shade of that bowlder deep in that lost valley of the Abyssinian hinterland mountains, a dying black native, thanking us for saving his life and speaking the King's English. It got me by the throat, I can tell you. Made me want to pinch myself to see if I was real.

I don't think Tupper was as astounded. He didn't know how far off the beaten track we were. And that black had spoken of New York! Shining shoes! A Negro shine-boy blacking boots in the lobby of some skyscraper on Broadway. No, not a Negro. The Abyssinians are black Caucasians. But they don't speak English and thank you for saving their lives. Only we hadn't saved this fellow's life, either. He started to cough and blood bubbles came to his lips.

"He's dying," Tupper muttered; and the native suddenly grinned: "Yes."

I poured some more water through his teeth, and he got up on one elbow. "That lion—he follow me all morning. I think I leave him behind. But he catch. You save me from him. You my friends. You I reward."

I wanted to question him before he went completely out of his head. "How'd you get in this valley?" I asked. "You and that lion are the first living things we've seen for miles. Where are we? Can you tell us where lies the main trail?"

His eyes rolled like white moons and the crimson grin widened on his face. "I alone. This a forbidden valley. No man dare come here. God will punish. See. He has punished me. I die. No man should come to this valley. No. But I did not believe and I come. Now I die."

His tone of voice brought the damp out on my face. Tupper was impressed, too. He leaned over the wretched creature. "I say now. Why? Why should no one come into these hills?"

The teeth clacked in the black's jaw. "They sacred. This valley sacred. Look. Many years ago, many years before Solomon—before the Lion of Judah—long, long back there was the flood. The flood! It was here." He fell back with a groan. "You listen? Then I tell you. Listen well."

And into our astonished ears, that dying Abyssinian poured out the story of the flood. *The* flood, you understand. In faltering, fragmentary sentences he strangled out that story known to every infant in Sunday school; while Tupper and I listened and didn't believe our hearing. The story from Genesis. The story of Noah and the Ark!

CAN you imagine how preposterous the whole thing was? That poor black devil was dying—dying from the claws of the lion that lay down the slope with my bullet in its

skull and the flies already feeding on its hide—and that Abyssinian was spending his last efforts to tell us the story of Noah's Ark.

I wasn't so surprised to hear an Abyssinian recite a Bible story. Around 300 A.D. Christianity was carried into Ethiopia by the Phœnician, Frumentius. About the time of Pedro da Covilham, a lot of Portuguese monks went in there and firmly established the religion. The Abyssinians are Coptic Christians, and devout. Many of those tribesmen know the Good Book better than present-day New Yorkers.

But this black man's method of telling and his version of the story was what got under my skin. He described the flood and the Ark and Noah in vivid detail. And he added a piece I'd never heard before.

"And two of every animal," he panted on, "was put in the great Ark. Yes. And then Noah took his gold. Much gold. More gold than any king would have. Yes. Noah put his gold in the Ark, too."

The eyes bulged in his graying face as he told us about Noah storing his treasure in the Ark. His tongue flickered over his lips as he told us about that gold, and you would have thought he was seeing it.

"Much—much gold. In the Ark. And then the rain came. Noah, he sail away. Where do he sail? The Ark float over these mountains. The water go away. The Ark—it is in these mountains. In a little lake. It is there. There—"

His breath gave out with a gurgle, and we gave him a little more of our precious water, and he almost sat up.

"That—that my story. Every Abyssinian know it. They know Noah and the Ark—full of animals and gold—sail over these mountains—and stop here. That why these valleys are sacred. Yes. No man should come here. When I am a boy the priest of the Coptic shrine at Lalibela, he tell me the story. I do not believe. I go to America. When I hear the story in that great country—I believe. America is wise. It, also, tells of Noah and the Ark. So I believe—and come back here. I come back," he groaned, "to *see* this Ark. To find it. I come back to—steal the gold!"

His face was contorted with pain as he said that, and he flopped on his side.

"The poor devil is making a confession," I whispered to Tupper. "A dying confession. He thinks Heaven is punishing him for a heresy. He probably believes the Lord sent that lion to slay him—"

"The Lord kill me for doing wrong!" he exclaimed, grabbing at my arm. "I die. But wait. I tell you. This story of Noah—it true. The Ark—it here! Along about five mile. There you see a lake. The Ark is in that lake! *I saw the Ark!*" His eyes were wide and his fingers bit into my arm. "The Ark—I saw. *I saw Noah! The animals! The gold!*"

He yelled out those words, and suddenly the flesh crawled along my spine. He had seen the Ark and Noah and a hoard of gold. Whew! It was raving nonsense, of course. I'd heard legends of men finding traces of the Ark. I knew, too, that the Abyssinians believed that certain of the saints lived on forever, leading recluse lives where human mortals couldn't find them, fasting and praying in hermit caves and dying only on that day when Gabriel's horn should depopulate the earth.

But here was a man who claimed he had seen one. Noah. And his Ark and treasures.

There was something in his voice that made his words sound true. I couldn't believe his story, and I couldn't disbelieve it.

He had stolen into these forbidden hills to see the Ark and he had seen it! I shot a look at Tupper. Beads of sweat were glittering on the Englishman's forehead. He shot a strange look at me. Then he bent over the dying black man.

"Where?" His voice was low and harsh and throaty. "I say, where is this Ark that you saw?"

"I tell you." The Abyssinian whispered and a thread of blood leaked from his teeth. "Five—maybe ten mile. Up this valley. The river start there. You see trees. A big lake. The Ark and Noah—and the treasure—on that lake—"

His white eyes stared and a ghastly pallor suffused his dark cheeks. A sudden spasm convulsed his mangled frame, and his worries were over.

I don't know how long Tupper and I squatted there like sticks, glaring at that poor dead devil. I know the sun was westering and shadows had crept up the slope when Tupper finally spoke. He pivoted on his heels and his eyes were queer in his face as he reached out and got me by the sleeve.

"Bradshaw!" he rasped. "I say, Bradshaw. I believe him. Men don't lie with their dying breath. This fellow spoke the truth. So come along. I want to see this lake he told of. I—I want to see the Ark!"

Lord forgive me, I wanted to see it, too!

WELL, it all had happened so suddenly it sounds like madness. The native and the lion had appeared as if by magic; I'd shot the lion in half a wink; and the native had rewarded us with his amazing story in less time than it takes to tell. But that was Abyssinia and things are different in Abyssinia, you bet they are!

To understand why Tupper and I started down that valley believing we'd find something as almighty ridiculous as Noah's Ark, you'd have to see those vast and vacant cliffs towering up to touch the sky and listen in on that monstrous silence.

You know the queer feeling it gives you to stare up the side of a tall building or look down into a deep gorge with a tiny river at its bottom. That's the way I felt in those lost mountains of the Gojjam region. It was just the place for a dying native to spin a yarn of pure nonsense and make it sound rational. And it was just the yarn to make two fools forget they were lost.

Then it occurred to me we weren't lost, at that. The reason our guide hadn't turned up was because the valley was sacred and forbidden. No doubt if we rode straight on for a few hours we'd ride out of the forbidden area and locate our Abyssinians again. However, I wasn't of the mind to rationalize. And Tupper had an expression on his face queer as madness.

"Think of it," he kept gasping. "Noah's Ark—here! And Noah!"

"Noah!" I snapped. "Say, don't let your reason run away from you altogether. No doubt that native saw something. Maybe he saw the actual ruins of the Ark where it was stranded in one of these inland lakes. But he never saw those animals or Noah, himself. You don't mean to tell me you believe that part of the crazy yarn!"

Tupper didn't reply. He just jabbed spurs into his horse. I never saw an Englishman so robbed of his tradition-

al British calm. A cord was standing out on his jaw and a little trickle of sweat wiggled down the side of his nose. To see him so upset sort of reminded me I was acting like an idiot.

"This is blithering nonsense," I told myself; but I chased him up the shadowing trail just the same.

Meantime the afternoon was waning. If there was anything to see I wanted to see it before darkness set in. I spurred, too. The echo of beating hoofs conjured a legion of invisible horsemen riding down the cliffs that fenced the valley in. The sun was a crimson globe hung low in a sky of burned umber. Grotesque shadows carpeted our stony trail; and sure enough, we hadn't gone a mile farther before evidences of vegetation substantiated the native's story of a forest and a land-locked lake where a river might rise.

Then Tupper rounded a sharp headland that jutted out of the valley's cliff-fence, and held up a hand with a yell.

"Look! Trees!" He sat his saddle, pointing: and I was able to stare up a long pebbly slope patrolled at the top by a line of stalwart eucalyptus which stood like graven etchings against the sky. Behind the trees a gibbous cloud-bank rested like a blossoming white mushroom; and I knew there must be a lake lying under that horizon.

It was a surprise, I tell you. The native had promised us those trees would be there, but it was like coming across a New England farm sprouting green in the middle of the Sahara.

Well, we raced up the slope as fast as our tired mounts could go, but it had altered from maroon to blue in coloring by the time we gained its top, and the sun had sunk in sky-sea painted in pink.

I wish I could describe the view we found when we stood in the shadow of those tall eucalyptus trees at ridge-top. The whole thing was like a mirage. The valley below must have been the crater of a monstrous volcano blown open when the world was young. Miles away, on the other rim of the crater, one caught a hazy glimpse of a divide down which a river could have wandered westward to the back of beyond.

Now the divide made a cup for the sunset, and the peaks on either side were nesting places for low clusters of cloud. The inner walls of this crater were massed with brilliant green, blanketed with jungly forest. And like a mirror at the crater's bottom, flat and glistening, spread the enameled waters of the mountain lake.

NO time to stop and stare. Already the pink was fading from that patch of sunset sky. The evening clouds were fattening. From the region of cliffs we had left behind, a yellow round moon was rising.

Wordless, Tupper and I started down through the trees, seeking a path to the bottom. A mile or so down we found one. Rank, weed-grown, it meandered like a creek through the thickening forest. Darkness set in, and damp. We pushed along, depending on the faint luminescence of the rising moon.

Now and then we could glimpse patches of the lake below, or see the rim of the crater across the broad valley. Clouds were gathering there in dead earnest, and there was a hint of rain. We pushed our lathering horses faster. We wanted to get down to the shore of that lake.

When we did, Tupper was still leading. Through the wedge of trees we caught a view of dark water and a

spread of beach. I remember a squad of herons that started up from the water and flapped away, hooting mournfully. Small animals under foot, too. What a sportsman's paradise that place would have been! But I wasn't thinking of that. I could only think of that lake and what we might see when we stood on its shore.

Impossible that we should have seen anything, of course, for the lake was miles long. Why it should have been anywhere near the point where we should come out on the beach was nothing but madman's luck.

Tupper rode through a sandalwood grove and out under a gnarled baobab tree, and I heard him utter an astonished yell. I rode out behind him. Our horses stood on a little fan of shore, bright under the moon-washed sky. The green of the jungly forest reared behind us. Dark water scribbled with the gold of moonbeams lay before. Tupper was glaring at a shadow resting on the ripples perhaps a mile offshore. The eyes were starting from his head, and his mouth labored to frame the words.

"The Ark!"

NOAH'S ARK! I give you my word, I almost flopped from my saddle in astonishment. For there was that improbable craft floating before my very eyes; and if it wasn't the Ark of Noah, I'd like to have known, right then, what it was. You know those little wooden Noah's Arks they sell in toy stores? Here was one of them, enlarged ten million times, drifting in those backwaters of that lost Abyssinian lake.

No ship was ever built in such a way. Here was a huge, floating barn with blunt prow and stern and high roof—an enormous wooden barge grotesque with funny projecting balconies and odd tiers of windows. And even from a distance we could see the affair was old.

Old? It looked as ancient as the sky. Mats of fungi clung to that awkward hull. Vines and patches of moss looped from the edge of the sagging roof. A queer tangle of weeds appeared to hang on its landward side to give it a starboard list. Drifting full in the moonlight, the thing was a phantom, gray and ghostly—a wraith escaped from the earliest pages of the Old Testament. I tell you, it gave me a turn.

How we stared! And then Tupper was in the lake; I after him. We swam. Starved, lost, tired we were, but we never remembered it. The shock of the plunge in cold water never brought sense to our brains, either. We swam toward that floating relic like a relay team.

Afterward I looked this up in the Bible and memorized the details. According to the Good Book, the Lord told Noah to make himself an ark three hundred cubits long, fifty wide and thirty high. The divine voice told Noah to build the ark in three stories and fix a door in the roof. Let me tell you, this barge in that Abyssinian lake was built tallying to directions. When we neared the thing and I distinguished a gangway lowered down the side of the hull, leading from water's edge to a broad doorway in the sloping roof, I could have drowned in abject astonishment.

A pale mist had started to smoke up from the lake surface. Shot through with shafts of moonbeams, the vapor wreathed gently about the black hull and made it more hoary and weird than ever.

Tupper carried himself to the craft

with strong overhand strokes; swung, dripping, on to the gangway; beckoned me to follow. I won't forget the way my stomach knotted when I clambered up beside him. The wooden handles of that gangway were greasy with damp must. Under foot the wood was slippery, covered with moss. Great barnacles decorated the hull at water's edge, and the planks looked waterlogged and rotten.

The old hulk was drifting slowly, and the moving water whispered, lapping at the rotted wood. The whole affair was so dank and eerie I'd have been contented to leave her, then, and swim away. Not so Tupper. He was up the gangway without a word. Grinning fatuously, I trailed him. Fancy swinging up the gangway of Noah's Ark! Creepy's the word. Like poking your nose into an Egyptian tomb or leaning against the Sphinx.

Just as we gained the gaping door in the roof the moon burrowed into a haze of smoky cloud and the moonlight turned green. It was then I noticed the sullen phalanx of thunderheads that had swiftly crowded the rest of the sky. No breeze riffled the water of the lake below. The air was taut, apprehensive. Wringing water off my wrists, I glared at Tupper, who stood staring into that amazing door.

"LOOK here, Tupper," I said—and my voice seemed to break a quiet that had been solid for a million years. "Look here! We're forgetting our reason. We better get off this hulk in a hurry. There's a storm coming up. I've been in storms on these African lakes before. They're tornadoes."

The Englishman hadn't spoken ten words since we'd heard that native's yarn back among the crags, and he did not speak now. Maybe you wouldn't have talked, yourself, if you'd been standing in the main hatchway of Noah's Ark. Tupper, remember, was young; and he'd never before been out of England, where things work according to rule.

The moonlight was green on his wet cheeks, and he had an expression on his face I never want to see anywhere again. I mean, there was no expression. Only his eyes were bright points of metal behind a dripping tangle of hair, and the breath kept sighing from his lips.

Without a word he stepped into that dank hatchway. Of course I was hard on his heels. A dead breeze smote us in the face as we crossed the doorsill, and a bat or something equally musty flickered over our heads. The phantasmal light of the thin-veiled moon dropped through narrow windows and revealed a barren passageway that breathed a scent of age.

I didn't want to walk down that passageway, but my companion stepped down it in a minute. Why, the whole thing was like the top floor of an abandoned hotel. A hundred empty rooms and odd-shaped compartments opened on the passage, and a hundred thousand rats scurried in retreat ahead of us.

"For God's sake be careful!" I warned, fearing our feet might crash through the rotten flooring any minute.

Tupper didn't hear. He'd found an open trap at the end of the passage, and I saw him disappear down a ladder. I clambered down after him, and found myself in a lofty, barn-wide room piled deep with bags and bales of stale grass. When I saw the grass I got a scare. Certainly some one had put it there!

Tupper glared at it, too, and started

across the room toward a row of doors leading aft. He took four steps, and caught his foot on s o m e t h i n g and stumbled. When he gained his feet, I reached him, and found him gazing down at a huge brass ring fastened to the floor. Another trap door. Reaching down, he tugged on the ring, and the door lifted open. Right then I won the prize shock of my whole life!

ANIMALS! There must have been a hundred animals down in that dim, cavernous hold. Baboons, horses, cheetahs, antelopes, cats, lions, a giraffe. That broad, gloomy hold into which we g l a r e d was literally filled with an amazing congregation of beasts crowded together in the shadowy gloom—a gloom that smelled like the summed-up odor of ten thousand zoos.

Will you believe it when I say there were *two* of each species? Will you believe when I say those animals were standing tame, motionless? That astonishing menagerie! Here was a leopard poised beside a gazelle; a wild pig crouching at the feet of a pygmy hippo. Shadows massed in the dusk. Wow! I hung my face over the edge of that trap, looking down, and almost fell through.

For the sight of those animals may have been astounding, but the vision of the old man down there was utterly, monstrously unbelievable.

A steep ladder of narrow steps dropped from the trap where Tupper and I were hanging paralyzed with the wonder of it; and at the foot of these steps the old man sat. He sat hunched over a table, squinting at a tiny framework of bone on which his twig-like hands were working.

A bowl of tallow burned smokily at his elbow, the wavering flame-light casting an amber halo about his bent head. A snowy mane of hair flowed down his bowed shoulders, and his beard was a white waterfall that got in the way of his fingers as they tinkered. A loose white robe shrouded his withered frame. The aureole of light on his face found it a mask of parchment.

The mob of animals massed behind him seemed to watch him at work. As Tupper and I stared—too astonished for words—the pair of lions (lion and lioness, by Heaven!) disengaged themselves from the shadowy group and padded noiselessly about the ancient one's work-table. Tame? Tame as cats in a grocery.

The lioness rubbed against the old man's legs; the lion roamed around the table. The old man reached out to absently pat the beast's muzzle.

Save my soul, if those animals hadn't moved I'd have believed the entire thing a mesmeric delusion. Those motionless beasts standing in the gloom were so unreal, and the old, old man was so convincingly a dream. But the two lions did more than move. The lioness began to lash the tip of her tail. The lion g r o w l e d. My ears couldn't have been fooled. And suddenly that lion s w u n g its majestic head, stared up the ladder down which *we* glared, saw us with eyes like points of phosphorus, and roared! A mighty thunderclap of sound.

The vibrations of that terrific, silence-shattering bellow echoed like an explosion; seemed to start the deck a-tilting under us. The old man bounced up from his seat as if he'd been kicked. The lioness repeated her mate's roar. Lion, lioness and old man turned their eyes up the ladder and saw me.

I think the old man let out a yell.

I know I did. God knows I'd wanted to yell for a long time. At least the silence was scattered away.

Tupper shouted something about Noah; and then the lions were pawing at the foot of the ladder, tails whipping, and the old, old whitebeard had a knife in his hand and fury in his eye.

If you don't believe lions can climb steps, you're crazy. The pair of them started topside with a spring. The old man came scrambling behind them, whiskers blowing, steamy gasps escaping from his open mouth. The murderous stiletto in his hand gleamed like a heated wire in the dimness. His eyes were livid coals.

You can bet Tupper and I danced away from the edge of that hatch. We didn't have time to shut the trap. We started back with a jump, came up against the bales of straw, wheeled like caged beasts in the dark, stumbled, ran.

There had been the glint of homicide in old man Noah's eyes. Those trained lions of his had looked mighty famished.

Two things more I noticed in that sudden wild burst of activity. I noted I was the world's champion damned fool for leaving my guns back on shore with the horses. I noticed that this dream-barge which I had invaded was suddenly rocking like a ship in mid-ocean. The deck reeled, tilting like a drunken sailor.

Tupper and I floundered frantically. Somewhere thunder was crashing. It sounded as if the sky had fallen, collapsed with a bang on the roof of that wallowing barn. A burst of rain hammered the creaking hull. A blinding half-second of lightning dissolved the darkness, revealed a row of windows gushing wet wind—and showed the head of the lioness poking up out of the hatch.

WE bolted. We fled among the bales of straw, seeking doors. We could hear the lions galloping after us; the old man uttering squeaky shouts. The dark was treacherous, the deck under foot a tilting trick. Once—several years after—I saw a movie comedy in which an escaped lion chased a pair of terrified comics through a maze of rooms. I guess our race was similar.

Tupper banged into a door, and we went through it fast. Down a weird passageway. Through another door. That nightmare of Noah and his pets followed fast. We didn't know our way. They knew theirs.

Outside it was storming. Thunder was falling down the heavens, crashing like smashing drums of glass. Lightning blazed. Now we'd be rushing through blank night. Then there'd be a second of glaring day. And every time we'd turn a corner we could glimpse our pursuers sweeping around the turn behind us: the galloping lions, the old man floating along in his white robe and brandishing his needle-like knife.

I tell you the thing was too fantastic for credence. That old Ark bowling through a storm. An Englishman and a Yankee sprinting around a dark puzzle chased by a legend and his trained pets. Twisting this way, dodging that, Tupper led the race. Somewhere we found a long alleyway, ran for all we were worth. A burst of lightning revealed two open windows at its end and a patch of black, boiling sky.

"The windows!" I screamed at Tupper. "Big enough for us to jump through. Come on!"

We were beside the ports in a second, black rain whipping at our heads.

The sky outside split open, stabbed through and through with jagged bolts of white flame. The clouds boomed. I caught an eye-flicker picture of the lake below—a heaving, tumbling surf. Good Lord! the water was almost up to those ports. Spray smote my face. The waves climbed high. The barge rolled dangerously, groaned, shuddered, creaked.

"Quick!" I shrieked, grabbing at Tupper. "We must jump!"

The lightning played again. The vivid glow lit up that Englishman's face. What do you think? The man was laughing!

"Jump if you want to!" he howled. "You could have jumped when we were running aft—we passed twenty windows. But I'm staying."

"You're staying?" I squalled at him.

He laughed shrilly. "You bet I am! Those lions won't catch me. Noah won't either. I'm staying. *I'm going to find the gold!*"

"You fool!" I shrieked. "Find gold? Fool! You'll be caught in two jumps. Look—they're coming up the passage now. Jump!"

I snatched his wrist. He struggled. I could hear him laughing. I shoved him against the lurching sill of the port.

"I'm staying!" he screamed. "Go yourself!"

His fist drove into the side of my jaw and I flopped through the window into storming water. The waves whirled me head over heels. I was under. I was up. I swam, fighting through whitecaps. Through a blind and howling blackness I swam. Finally my feet touched bottom. A comber doubled me into a granny's knot, and flung me onto dry land. Land, anyway, however wet.

I lay on my back and the rain pelted my face. Finally the pelting became a gentle tapping. Exhausted, mentally dead, I must have slept. Thunder and tossing water muttered; were forgotten.

YOU know how a violent storm will quickly attack a small lake and as quickly die out. When I dropped into sleep the rain had ceased. I woke with hot sunshine in my eyes. Steam was rising from my muddied clothes. I lay on a little fan of white beach backed by dripping, grass-green foliage.

With a hasty rush of memory, I leaped to my feet. Yes, there was the lake, cerulean under cloudless morning skies, rippling gently, burnished by the beams of the rising sun. I stared. The water was at peace. Distant across the water, the opposite shore was a sweep of emerald.

A clump of palms cut off the view where the beach on which I stood curved westward. Small parrots flitted among the fronds. Bugle-birds sang. A stork waddled up the shallows, sighted me, and flapped away. And I stared. I stared at the lake. Offshore about a mile, a brown smear on the surface marked a patch of roily water. A scatter of black spars drifted there. The rest of the Ark was gone!

Finally I gave up staring and forced my feet to plod up the sand. I felt pretty sick, too. I felt pretty lonely and ill. I ambled down the shore, and the sweat was prickling out on my face, and it was then I stumbled across the nyala gazelle. A nyala! The mockery of it. Undoubtedly it had been one of the Ark's menagerie, drowned and tossed landward by the storm. There it lay, legs stretched stiff, neck arched, head back. I wasn't interested in rare specimens at that moment. Dully I

gazed at the dead beast. I could only remember my vanished companion, and Noah, and— Suddenly I was down on my knees glaring at that nyala gazelle. That nyala . . .

But I didn't get a chance to find out. I heard a sound. Bootheels crunching on sand. I looked up. And saw Tupper!

He wandered out of the grove of palms that screened the curve of beach farther westward. Wandered, I say. He came toward me at a shambling pace, but he didn't see me. His clothes were in rags; his face was a white, set cast; and when I saw the stare of his eye the shivers trickled down my spine.

I shouted his name, but he never heard. Straight toward me he shuffled, head up, eyes stary, hands hanging in fists at his sides. He walked up to me and right on past without so much as giving me a glance. There was a bump as big as a hen's egg on his left temple. When I saw that, I knew. Tupper marched on, unswerving. Like a somnambulist. As he passed me by I heard him muttering under his breath.

"They were drowned. Noah. The Ark. Gone." A low, shocked whisper.

"He's batty!" I was whispering myself. Whispering and cold. "Crazy. Crazy as a loon!" And finding my legs, I chased that weird figure up the sand. I caught him and held him by the wrist, and he just stood there, staring. He didn't know it when I finally led him along. He opened one fist and stared at the little object in his palm as he walked. The object in his palm, you understand, was a little gold idol!

"AND that," said Bradshaw, pausing to empty his hot pipe by tapping it on the ship's rail, "is my story." He tucked the pipe into his pocket, and turned on me with a bemused smile; chuckled.

The young British consular agent at my elbow chuckled, too. After all, it was I who disputed my friend's story. There was Africa—a black shore-line slipping by abeam, and our ship was a reality.

"Some yarn!" I admitted, getting the naturalist by the sleeve. "But, whew! Look here, old man. You don't expect us to believe you actually saw Noah's Ark, to say nothing of the Biblical menagerie and *Noah!* That would be a whopper. Didn't you prepare us for this by quoting that Arab proverb before you started the tale? The proverb about believing only half of what you hear of Africa, and nothing of what you see?"

The naturalist grinned. "Hmmm. Let's suppose a few things. In the first place, there was Camille Caillard, who disappeared in those mountains fifteen years before I got there. A genius. A little cracked on this naturalist game. Suppose he locked himself in those Abyssinian backhills of Gojjam; found that inland lake and settled down for a stay. Good timber in that valley. Say he built himself a floating barn. Say he started stocking it with a collection of specimens. All sorts of specimens in the surrounding forests. Hunter's paradise. What a locale for a naturalist! He stays and stays on. Becomes something of a hermit. Collecting becomes his one passion. Strange mental quirks can come to lonely white men deep in Africa.

"His mob of animals? Listen. The pair of lions were his pets and alive no end. The others? I don't know for sure. They looked live enough in the shadows of that craft's deep hold. But the nyala gazelle that had floated ashore after the storm—I wish I'd examined it more closely. Close scrutiny might have proved it stuffed! Maybe all those

other animals were stuffed. Caillard would be a master taxidermist. It's a real art. And he was working at a framework of bones. And there was that deckload of straw.

"But Tupper came along, and I had no chance to examine that nyala. I led Tupper up the beach, and we found our horses where we'd left them. We rode away from that lake. Later we found our guides. Tupper never spoke. All the way out of Abyssinia, out of Africa, back to England he never spoke. The London doctors said he'd get over it. Mental shock to his deep-rooted religion. Aphasia. They told me to keep the gold idol and never let him see it again, and maybe he'd come around. I understand he did, finally. But he didn't recall Abyssinia.

"Getting back to Caillard, remember this. He'd been a goldsmith before he became a collector. That might explain any gold found aboard his 'ark.' Say he carried a few ingots along with him. Something to work on when he had nothing else to do. Maybe, when his mind became deranged by genius or solitude—I'm guessing at it all—he determined to fashion the only specimen he hadn't been able to capture for his collection. I don't know. But it might explain *this*. Look at it."

Bradshaw drew something from his pocket; held it in shut fist. "This sort of brings the story back to the Noah legend again. This makes me wonder if, after all, that really wasn't *the* Ark. Makes me wonder if all of those animals weren't alive. Makes me wonder if that old man wasn't Noah come down through the ages. Noah in person. This makes me wonder. I suppose I'll always wonder. For Abyssinia is Abyssinia, you know. And my Arab proverb doesn't say anything about disbelieving what you can feel! So run your fingers over this. This is the gold idol Tupper was carrying in his fist."

Bradshaw held out his palm. On his palm rested a beautifully carved little idol of solid yellow gold. The idol was carved to represent a dove with its wings poised for flight. A little gold dove, it was. *And in its beak it carried an olive branch!*

THE END.

He crushed Quivven the Goldenflame in his arms

The Radio Menace

Armed with a mysterious discovery that can make robot slaves out of human beings, three Whoomangs from Venus invade America, to the fearful peril of reporter Larrabee and Federal Attorney Endicott who cross their path

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

Author of "The Radio Gun Runners," "The Radio Flyers," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

THE strange disappearance of Assistant District Attorney Eliot Endicott, who had been investigating a mysterious wave of robberies and kidnapings, leads reporter Lawrence Larrabee, of the Boston *Post,* on a strange trail in the New Hampshire woods.

In the little town of Bartlett, he looks over Helyn Kent's shoulder and reads the note Endicott managed to slip into a mail chute, telling his cousin how he had been carried from his Boston office by a monster looking like a pterodactyl, and that this winged dragon was the "King" of the criminals.

Larrabee tries to see Miss Kent, but she has not returned and her father, Blackstone Kent, suspiciously kicks him out.

Then Aaron Cohen, a rather likable but too ambitious young man who is the chief agent of the kidnapers, succeeds in carrying off both Miss Kent and Larrabee, but Larry escapes. Cohen, under the name of Washington Jones, operates the lumber camp which

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is headquarters and arsenal of the invaders. His chiefs are three strange creatures from the planet Venus: Boomalayla, the gray winged dragon; Doggo, the antman, who is about the size of a horse; and Princess Quivven the Goldenflame, a lovely human-seeming girl covered with a soft golden downy fur. They have marvelous scientific powers, such as the ability to transmit matter, and even human beings—anything but metal—as wireless energy from one place to another.

But their real program is to conquer this world, by recruiting an army of humans, and making slaves of them—robots, automaton-like creatures—by implanting a moth-like grub in their heads. This grub they call a "new-soul," and it makes obedient "Whoomangs" out of the victims. They can give animals and birds high intelligence by grafting a "new-soul" in their brains. Even Quivven is a Whoomang.

CHAPTER IX.

INTRIGUES AMONG THE WHOOMANGS.

THE triumvirate and their premier, Aaron Cohen, were in deep conference in the throne room. Cohen reported the capture and the mysterious escape of Lawrence Larrabee the evening before. But he announced that before going to bed, he had planted spies, both human and animal, in the village, and consequently felt confident that Larrabee could not make a single move without its becoming immediately known at headquarters.

"And now," said he, "let's play our trump card with Eliot Endicott. His sweetheart, Helyn Kent, is in our power. She has been given a new-soul. Dr. Chapin reports that the operation was successful, and that she is resting comfortably. She is one of us now. Let's take the young assistant district attorney to see her."

The eyes of Quivven the Goldenflame narrowed dangerously; then she smiled. "I myself can handle young Endicott," said she, "without any assistance from any other woman. He has already promised *me* to submit voluntarily to the operation."

"Well I'll be—" whistled Cohen, then checked himself, and finished instead with, "Your Majesty is certainly what we call a quick worker."

"Do you care for this prisoner?" inquired the huge antman, Doggo, through his radio speaker.

"What if I do?" countered Quivven swiftly.

"Remember, my dear, that you are a Whoomang."

"It is true that my soul is a Whoomang soul," said she, "and hence is utterly loyal to the cause; but my heart is the heart of a woman, and shall seek its mate where it will."

Doggo abruptly changed the subject.

"This Endicott person," said he; "you plan to turn him loose, do you, as soon as he is operated on? You plan to use him to confound the authorities, so as to keep them off our trail?"

"Why not?" asked Cohen.

"It seems to me," replied the antman, "that the authorities are already sufficiently confounded by his unexplained disappearance. If he goes back, he will have great difficulty in dissembling; in explaining why he does not reproduce his report from memory, for example. Let's keep him here."

"And let's turn the girl loose," suggested Quivven, "to prevent her father from coming after us, and so that she can spy on this newspaper reporter named Larrabee."

"And to keep her away from Eliot Endicott," added Doggo, a bit maliciously. Quivven scorned to reply to this.

DR. VICTOR CHAPIN was in his office in the hospital. At the particular moment when the knock sounded on his door, he was very much engrossed in kissing the pretty head nurse.

"Come in," said he, disengaging himself. "What is it?"

The door opened, and Quivven entered.

"I wish a word with you, alone," said she.

Chapin waved his hand with a gesture of dismissal, and the nurse withdrew.

"Now what can I do for your beautiful majesty?" he inquired.

Quivven dimpled, and then sobered.

"Will you do a personal favor for me?" she asked. "And tell no one, not even Doggo or the king?"

Chapin pursed up his lips reflectively.

"What will you give me, if I do?"

"Well—even a kiss or two," murmured Quivven provocatively.

"A bargain!" he exclaimed. "Love is meat and drink to me. And a kiss from Quivven the Goldenflame would be nectar and ambrosia. I am at your service."

The princess drew closer, resting her shapely hand on his arm, and whispered, "I want you personally to operate on Eliot Endicott. And forget to put in a soul."

Dr. Chapin whistled softly, and stared long and appraisingly at the Goldenflame.

"I'm game, if you are," said he at last. Then he seized the girl passionately in his arms, and crushed her golden form to him.

Outside, in the corridor, the pretty nurse lifted from the keyhole a face white with jealous rage, and clenched her little hands in anger. She, too, had a woman's heart, in spite of her Whoomang soul.

Quivven blushingly disengaged herself, recovered somewhat her regal manner, and left the office despite the entreaties of the medical Lothario that she remain.

Shortly thereafter Aaron Cohen was announced by Chapin's secretary.

"Doctor," he inquired, "did you get a good view of that Kent girl?"

"No," replied Chapin. "One of my assistants operated. Why?"

"With all due respect to yourself as a Whoomang," said Cohen, "I hate to think of that beautiful girl as having been dehumanized. I thought that I was a cold intellectual, immune to women; but I could learn to love a girl like Helyn Kent. If I hadn't been so intent on getting that letter away from her, I might have noticed her beauty before; and her operation might have been prevented."

"But it was you who insisted on an immediate operation," interjected the young doctor, inwardly amused.

"Yes, I know, I know," admitted Cohen. "It was advisable, for the safety of the cause. I suppose it's too late to do anything now, but it's a pity, a great pity."

"Say, just what are you leading up to?" asked Chapin.

"Nothing, nothing," Cohen hastened to say; then with an attempt at sounding irrelevant: "If the soul were to be removed from a Whoomang, what would happen?"

"Nobody knows," replied the doctor, professionally. "It might restore to the person her own proper personality. It might leave her without any

guiding intellect whatever, a driveling idiot. It might kill her. God knows. It's never been tried."

Cohen shuddered.

"Thank you," said he.

"Personally," asserted the doctor, "I prefer 'em as Whoomangs. Makes 'em more docile, you know."

"Chapin," exclaimed the other, "if I didn't respect you as a scientist and an ally, I should say that you were a perfect beast. Good day." And he stalked out.

THE doctor, with a wry smile, went at once to Eliot Endicott's private ward.

"I want to have a confidential talk with you," he announced, closing and locking the door. After making sure there were no spying rats or pigeons about, he continued, "Her majesty Princess Quivven says that you are game to have a Whoomang soul implanted in your brain."

Quivven had just been in to see her lover again, and her spell was again upon him.

"Yes," he admitted dully, "I—I suppose I am."

"Then let me tell you something in strictest confidence. I am to perform the operation in person, and I shall accidentally omit to put in the soul. You will retain your own personality, for Quivven the Goldenflame likes you just as you are, and does not dare risk a change."

Endicott's face lighted up with relief.

"How can I ever repay you, doctor?" he breathed.

"By pretending at every moment to be a Whoomang," Chapin replied solemnly. "Quivven's position, my position and even my life, are at stake if the king ever suspects. We are risking a great deal, Mr. Endicott."

"But how am I to be sure that the moth-grub was left out?"

Acting on a sudden impulse, Dr. Chapin made a confession, little guessing that the head nurse stood just outside the door, with her ear pressed against the panel. "I have no new-soul either, Mr. Endicott, although no one suspects it. I was one of the first humans on whom the newcomers operated. The Whoomangs were new to the conditions on this planet, they were hurried and clumsy; and somehow the moth-grub, picked out for me, failed to get put in. But I pretended to turn Whoomang, for the sake of my great future. You must do the same. Look around you. Is there a single person whom you have met in the organization, who has not been reduced to dumb bestiality by the operation? Cohen never underwent the process. Quivven? Yes; but she is not an ordinary human, she is a marvelous creature from another planet. The operation affects different species differently. Some it improves. Witness the king, the pigeons and the rats. Some it does not affect. Witness her majesty and Doggo. Some it debases. Witness every single one of our thousands of humans. If you ever breathe a word of your true condition, *that* will be your fate; a genuine operation."

So Eliot Endicott was operated on. But the outraged head nurse assisted in the operation.

CHAPTER X.

TAKING THE OFFENSIVE.

WHEN Aaron Cohen's runabout slewed almost into the ditch, Larry burst his bonds and jumped into the night. He landed sprawled out in the ditch, his cut bonds

trailing behind him, his blindfold still clenched in one hand.

As he groped around in the darkness, he touched the open end of a large culvert. On sudden impulse, he crawled into this haven of refuge, dragging the ropes and the handkerchief with him, so as to leave no trace. Then he lay still, listening to the pursuit.

His late captors tramped up and down the ditch in vain, searching for him. The darkness and the weeds concealed the mouth of the drainpipe, and Cohen's searchlight did not happen to flash upon it.

Finally Larry heard Cohen exclaim, "If anything's happened to him, we can't afford to be seen here! Come on!"

He heard the sound of the departing car. Then he heard another car rumble by, on top of the culvert. After waiting what seemed a reasonable length of time, he started to crawl out; but the woods beside the road were lit by approaching headlights, and so he crawled rapidly back again into concealment. It was Cohen, and his two lumberjacks, returning.

There ensued another period of fruitless search, followed by the final departure of the pursuers. Larry waited a bit longer this time, then emerged from his hiding place, brushed himself off, and jog trotted back to town.

On the way, he did considerable thinking. That the men who had kidnaped him from his hotel room were part of the same outfit which had abducted the missing Federal attorney, seemed certain. That they knew that Larry was on their trail, seemed likely. But did they know that he was the same reporter whom they had shadowed as far as Rockingham Junction and there lost? And if so, how had they found it out? Perhaps that man, Jackson, from whom he had escaped in the taxi at the Junction, had come on to Bartlett and had seen and recognized him. Little did he suspect the real truth of the tapping of Helyn Kent's subconscious mind by Swami Singh. He did not even know of Helyn's capture.

Did the criminals suspect that he had seen Eliot Endicott's letter to Helyn? That seemed preposterously unlikely. How could they even know of the existence of the letter? It certainly was lucky that he had followed his hunch, and had hidden the envelope, just before his capture and the rifling of his pockets.

At any event, there was nothing further that he could do that evening. Early in the morning he must get in touch with the Kents. In the meantime, he had better watch his step, for undoubtedly his late captors lay hidden in the vicinity of the Bartlett Hotel, awaiting his return.

For a moment, he thought of hunting up some other lodgings. But then he realized that every cent of his money had departed, when his pockets had been searched in the rumble seat of his captors' car. Thus he would have to return to his own hotel, where, in the absence of any baggage, he had already paid for a week's room and board in advance—or else sleep in the park, which might turn out to be too conspicuous. For spending money, he could wire the *Post* on the morrow.

On entering the town, Larry kept to the curb of the most brilliantly lighted sidewalks, carefully avoiding alley-mouths and dark doorways. Thus he reached the hotel in safety.

"Has any one phoned?" he inquired of the clerk.

"No," replied the desk clerk, Charley, "but here's a gentleman would like to see you."

Larry turned, half expecting to see Blackstone Kent standing there, but instead he confronted a total stranger, a portly individual with a broad-brimmed hat.

The reporter was instantly on the alert.

"I don't think that I've had the pleasure—" he began tentatively.

"Oh, that's the chief of police," explained Charley nonchalantly.

THE official, as if to corroborate this assertion, tilted back the edge of one lapel of his coat, exposing a silver star, and at the same time asked "Mr. O'Brien?"

That being the name under which Larry had registered.

"Yes, that's Mr. O'Brien," the clerk again butted in.

"Then would you mind stepping outside for a moment?" said the chief. "I want to have a few words with you."

When they reached the sidewalk, the official continued, "You are under arrest. Will you come peaceably, or shall I have to handcuff you?"

Larrabee's first impulse was to ask indignantly what in thunder they thought he had done. But then his agile mind leaped to a realization that this arrest was a veritable godsend, for it would insure him a good night's sleep in peace, absolutely free from all worry of his enemies disturbing him before morning.

So in his meekest tone, he replied, "I will come peaceably."

He could protest his innocence in the morning, and if he failed to convince the authorities, he could send for a lawyer. Why, he could even send for Blackstone Kent! What a capital scheme for getting in touch with Helyn's father!

So he walked along with the chief of police.

"Where have you been all evening?" asked the chief. "Remember: anything you say will be used against you."

"Then I'd better not say it," replied Larry, grinning. "I'll make a complete statement in the morning—in the presence of counsel."

The jail turned out not to be half bad, as jails go. The young reporter slept the sleep of the just, without a care in the world.

When he awoke the next morning, the sun was streaming through the bars. A pigeon was strutting up and down on the sill outside.

The boy smiled grimly.

"So they've located me already," he muttered to himself. "Everything that I say, with that bird present, certainly will be used against me."

He had just completed dressing, when the chief of police appeared at the door of the cell.

"How are you feeling this morning?" the official inquired.

"Never felt better in my life," replied Larry truthfully.

"All ready for your confession?"

"Nothing doing, chief, until I get a lawyer."

"Have you any particular lawyer in mind? Now I know a real capable young fellow, who will defend you dirt cheap."

Larry glanced at the pigeon, which had ceased its strutting, and was standing motionless on the window sill, with its head cocked on one side.

"Let's talk in your office, chief," he suggested.

The office had no outside window. As they entered it, and sat down, Larry noticed this fact and heaved a sigh of relief.

"And now may I ask," said he, "just what I've been arrested for?"

"As a suspicious character."

"Fair enough," admitted the reporter. "I *am* a suspicious character. Very suspicious. But it's not you whom I suspect; so why arrest me?"

"It's *you* that's suspected," snorted the humorless official.

"What of? Or rather, of what?" asked Larry.

"Search me!" replied the chief. "Don't you know what you've done?"

"My conscience is as clear as a newborn babe's," asserted the prisoner. "But before I submit to any more of this third degree stuff," and he smiled grimly at the memory of some real third degree sessions he had known about. "I should like a lawyer. Would you mind sending for Blackstone Kent?"

The chief's jaw dropped.

"What?" he exclaimed. "Say that again."

"I said," repeated Larry, "would you mind sending for Blackstone Kent? What's the matter with him? Isn't he a good lawyer?"

"Well, I reckon!" exclaimed the still surprised official. "He's the best criminal lawyer in all New England. But don't you realize? It's he who had you arrested!"

It was now Larry's turn to be astounded.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" said he. "What for?"

Just then the telephone rang. The chief picked up the receiver. Whoever was at the other end of the line was talking loudly enough for Larry to hear.

"Is this the police station?"

"Yes."

"Blackstone Kent speaking. Have you a man named Larrabee there? Charley over at the hotel says you arrested him last night."

"No such thing," began the chief.

But Larry hastily interposed, "I'm Larrabee. That's my real name."

"Just a minute, Mr. Kent, there's a prisoner here who says that his name's Larrabee."

"Then I'll be right over."

The policeman wiped his brow, and stared at his prisoner in justified perplexity.

A FEW minutes later Blackstone Kent bustled in.

"Mr. Larrabee," said he, holding out his hand, "a thousand pardons. I just found your note. Why didn't you give it to me in person, instead of merely leaving it on my doorstep?"

"I did," replied the reporter, with a wry mouth, "but you threw it in my face, and slammed the door."

"Again, I say, a thousand pardons," apologized the lawyer. "And then, to add injury to insult, I had you arrested, thinking that you might be able to throw some light on my daughter's disappearance."

"Helyn disappeared!" exclaimed Larry.

"You seem quite familiar with my daughter, for one who has never met her," remarked Kent, with a tired ghost of a smile. "Yes, Helyn failed to come home last night." His voice shook with emotion as he said this, but he steadied himself and went on:

"She is not with any of our friends, and no trace has been found of her, or of the beach wagon which she was driving. The police of all the surrounding towns have been notified, but none of them have seen either her or the car. Your note suggests that you may be able to help me."

"I believe that I can," replied the reporter soberly, "but, if the chief will pardon me, what I have to say is for your ears alone."

The official promptly and obligingly excused himself, but Kent waved him back into his seat.

"No need to drive you out of your own office," said he, "We can talk over at the hotel."

As Kent and Larry left the jail, the former whispered, "He might have the place wired with a dictaphone, you know. He seemed too darned obliging."

Nothing more was said on the subject, until they reached the hotel. Up to room 31 they went. There was a pigeon on the sill. Larry shooed it away, and slammed down the window. Then he began the narration of what he knew of the disappearance of Eliot Endicott, of the pterodactyl which he had seen flying through the night, of the theft of Endicott's report, of the pigeons in his editor's window, and of the trip to Rockingham Junction and beyond. He even admitted the sudden interest which he had felt for the beautiful girl, Kent's daughter, on the train.

Just as he was about to tell the episode of the letter in the post office, he noticed a rat, standing silent and intent in a corner.

"Another spy!" he exclaimed and hurled a book at it.

It scampered down a hole, and Larry promptly stuffed the hole with newspaper. Then he continued his story, in a much lower tone of voice. Also he produced the envelope from under the dresser-top towel, and showed it to his visitor.

When he had reached the point where he had tramped out to Bemises, and had made his fruitless attempt to see Helyn, her father interrupted with an account of the call which he had received from the proprietor of the Jones Lumber Camp.

Then Larry in turn interrupted to ask, "What kind of car did he have?"

Blackstone Kent described it.

Whereupon Larry said grimly, "I took a little ride in that same car later in the evening."

And then recounted the story of his own kidnaping and escape.

When the two men had finished comparing notes, they were both convinced of certain basic facts, namely: that the band of super-criminals on whose trail Assistant District Attorney Endicott had been working, had kidnaped him; that the Jones Lumber Camp was an important cog in their organization; that the missing Eliot Endicott was probably at that camp; that "Mr. Jones" himself was one of the men who had tried to kidnap Larry; and that Helyn was probably in the clutches of these same criminals, perhaps because Eliot Endicott had been forced to admit sending her his S. O. S. letter.

What they couldn't understand was how that letter had come to be readdressed to the Jones Lumber Camp. They puzzled quite a lot over this, although they admitted that it really was a relatively immaterial detail.

THEY decided upon their plan of action. Each was to be always armed. Kent was immediately to phone all the surrounding towns for possible word of Helyn, while Larry called up the Boston *Post* to ascertain if there were any further clews as to the missing assistant district attorney, and to tip off the paper to the description of the Boston headquarters of the criminals, as stated in the missing man's letter to his cousin Helyn.

Then they were to meet again in Larry's room, and drive out to Morton's together.

Larry's phone call to the *Post* developed the fact that the authorities had uncovered no more clews, or at least had not divulged any. A reporter was at once detailed to try and find the office building described in Eliot Endicott's letter.

As Larry stepped out of the booth, he saw a familiar face—a young man of about his own age.

"Jack Blakeslee!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing up in this neck of the woods?"

"Flying," replied his friend. "My plane's over in a field just outside of town. And you?"

"Oh, I'm just on a vacation," lied Larry.

"More likely on a story of some sort," opined his friend. "But if you're really on a vacation, come along with me. I've got an extra seat."

"That gives me an idea!" exclaimed the reporter. "Come up to my room."

"I'll be up in just a minute. What's the number?"

"Thirty-one."

"O. K., then."

Larry went up to his room alone. The air was stuffy and oppressive, so he flung open the window again. There on the sill was the inevitable pigeon.

Exasperated, he heaved a tumbler at it. The missile struck the bird squarely. Rushing to the window, Larry looked out. On the shed roof just below, the pigeon was flapping feebly. Then it lay still. Impelled by a sudden impulse, Larry climbed out onto the roof, and retrieved the dead body.

Back in his room, he turned the inert form over in his hands, idly examining it. It seemed to be an ordinary enough pigeon, except in one particular. There was a noticeable scar on the back of its head.

"Maybe they pumped some brains into it," he snickered skeptically.

Then his attention was distracted by the flapping of wings outside. Hastily throwing the body into a bureau drawer, and slamming the drawer shut, he turned just in time to see another pigeon settle upon the window sill.

"This is too much!" he exclaimed, so he hastened down stairs and sought the clerk.

To him the reporter complained of his room being overrun with rats and pigeons, and demanded that something be done about it. Then Jack Blakeslee reappeared, and the two went up to room 31 together.

The paper was out of the rat hole, from which the tip of the rodent's nose now shyly protruded, and there were two pigeons and a sparrow on the window sill. But just as Larry was looking around for something more to heave, a large, sleek, well-fed black cat sauntered into the room from the hall.

"Now that's what I call service!" exclaimed Larry. "I just complained of vermin to the clerk, and here he's sent up the hotel cat, to keep them away from me."

The cat rubbed against his leg and purred. He reached down and scratched the side of its head. Then it jumped up onto the window sill, where it sat gazing dreamily off into space. The pigeons, and the sparrow, and the rat had departed.

"Now we can talk," said the boy, "while kitty stays on guard, to keep off eavesdroppers."

"Eavesdroppers?" asked Blakeslee, perplexed. "How can a cat keep off eavesdroppers?"

"Just listen to my story," replied Larry, "and you will understand."

Briefly he sketched to his friend all the momentous events which had occurred. Blackstone Kent arrived, was introduced, and reported that there was still no word of Helyn. Then Lawrence Larrabee broached his plan.

"It will do no good," said he, "for us to get out a search warrant, and go through the lumber camp, for this would give them sufficient time to spirit away both Eliot Endicott and Miss Kent. So let's fly over the camp in Jack's plane, and spy on them by surprise."

Blackstone Kent expressed immediate approval of the plan; then produced two automatic pistols, which he had just purchased for himself and Larry, and handed one to each of the men.

"Start at once," said he. "There is no time to be lost."

"Suits me," exclaimed Jack Blakeslee.

So Larry collected his few belongings, and they departed.

ON their way out of the hotel, Larry stopped to thank the clerk for the loan of the cat.

"Cat?" asked Charley. "What sort of a cat?"

So the reporter described it.

"No," said the clerk, "we haven't any cat in this here hotel. And what's more I don't know any one in town as has a black one. May belong to some summer folks though. Let's take a look at it."

So together they went up to the room, but the black cat was nowhere to be seen. What did it matter, anyway? The cat, no matter whose it was, had served its purpose by enabling them to make their plans in privacy, not spied on by pigeons or rats.

Blackstone Kent drove them out to Jack's plane, and soon the two were soaring away. The lumber camp was easily located, lying to the southward toward Mt. Chocorua. As soon as they identified it, they circled away, descended to a lower level, and then swept back again just above the treetops.

"Why, this is a regular military camp!" exclaimed Larry. "Look at the barbed wire fence all around it! Look at the armed guards patrolling the fence!"

"And look at what's going on in that tower!" Jack shouted back. "They evidently expect us."

In the midst of the camp there stood a high wooden observation tower, like those used by fire wardens, quite an expected thing to find in a lumber camp. But on its platform, there stood two men operating what looked like a searchlight, which they were turning frantically toward the oncoming plane.

"Why a searchlight in the daytime?" Larry exclaimed.

And then, as if in answer to his query, the motor sputtered and stopped completely.

Blakeslee tried to reach a point beyond the boundaries of the camp, before crashing, but he was flying too low. When he saw that he wasn't going to make it, the young aviator changed his tactics, and side-slipped down into a small clearing between the trees.

"Run for it!" he shouted, as the two of them clambered out of the plane.

Already a band of about a dozen lumberjacks were charging toward them through the woods.

So the two youths ran. Fleet of foot, they were beginning to outdistance their heavier pursuers, when the high barbed wire fence loomed ahead.

To make matters worse, a burly

guard stood between them and the fence, with a drawn automatic in his hand.

CHAPTER XI.

THE IGNITION RAY.

JACK and Larry were armed. When they found their escape blocked by the guard who stood with drawn gun at the barbed wire fence, Jack Blakeslee drew his own automatic and fired quickly. As a reserve officer of the air corps, he had not only learned flying, he had also had considerable practice on the target range, and this now stood him in very good stead.

His shot struck just where he had aimed it, the guard's forearm, and the fellow's weapon clattered to the ground. The guard, surprised and momentarily stunned by the wound, staggered backward and clutched the fence for support with his wounded left hand. For the present, he was disposed of, but the dozen lumberjacks were rapidly nearing, and the high woven fence, topped with its three strands of barbed wire, appeared to present just as insuperable an obstacle as before.

Frantically the two men looked around them for some way of escape.

To one side of the guard there was a gate in the fence. It was evidently unfastened, for an open padlock on a chain dangled beside it. Probably that is why this particular sentinel had been stationed here.

With a shout of joy and triumph, the two fugitives rushed forward. But even as they did so, a siren whistle sounded in the camp behind them. The guard, who was still clinging to the fence, let out a gurgling scream, slumped to the ground, with his hand still clutching the wires, and began a ghastly twitching dance, while the cords knotted in his neck, his face turned purple, his eyes rolled in their sockets, and guttural noises issued from his mouth.

"Back! Back!" shouted Larry, recoiling in horror at the sight. "The fence is electrified!"

The poor wounded guard had been unable in time to heed the siren warning, and thus unwittingly had sacrificed his life to warn Jack and Larry from the fate intended for them.

Now the lumberjacks were almost upon them.

Seizing a piece of broken tree-branch that lay on the ground near by, Larry pushed it against the gate to slide it to one side. By this time the whole fence was humming with the high-tension current. A nauseating smell of burned flesh was wafted toward them from the dead body of the guard. Sparks snapped at the end of the branch, as Larry touched it to the gate, and his arms tingled and twitched.

But he persisted, in spite of the pain, and got the gate open, just as their pursuers reached them.

Risking death if they so much as brushed against a wire, the two crowded through the opening. The lumberjacks halted abruptly, not daring to approach the death-dealing electricity. The two spies were safely through, and running off into the woods.

But one of the lumberjacks picked up a sizable stone, and hurled it with unerring accuracy after the rapidly departing pair. It grazed the side of Larry's head and he went down. Then the siren sounded twice, and the twelve men, as though released from a spell, charged through the opening.

Jack pulled Larry to his feet, thrust

one arm around his waist, and backed away from their pursuers, firing as he went. He was mad enough now to shoot to kill, but he was hampered by the inert body of his friend. Even so, one of the lumberjacks pitched forward onto his face, and the others halted.

Then, *crack!* And a bullet pinged past them.

Some one was shooting at them with a rifle from the watch-tower. Jack promptly dragged Larry behind some trees, inserted another clip in his automatic, and stood at bay.

Larry's eyes opened and he stumbled to his feet. Jack seized his friend's hand, and dragged him off through the woods. Gradually Larry recovered, as they ran. Soon he seemed his old self again.

"They'll be after us," he opined. "They'll expect us to make straight for Bartlett. Bartlett lies northwest from here; so let's head due north, and strike the road to Morton's."

THE two friends settled down to a fast walk. No sounds of pursuit were heard. Quite evidently they had eluded their enemies. They said nothing as they strode along, for they were saving their breath for walking.

Soon they found a north-bound trail, which facilitated travel.

After about twenty minutes, Larry suddenly stopped and laid his hand on Jack's arm, saying, "Listen!"

They listened. From behind them, faint but unmistakable, came the deep baying of dogs.

"Bloodhounds!" exclaimed Larry. "Bloodhounds, probably with human minds! Run if you never did before!"

And the two of them began to run again.

The path finally became rough and bumpy.

"Feels like railroad ties," panted Jack.

"It is!" replied Larry. "Look."

In front of them in a slight clearing, the ground made an abrupt dip and rise again, and directly ahead a wooden bridge with two iron rails spanned the little ravine. They had been running along the track of an abandoned logging railroad, which was so overgrown with moss and grass that they hadn't recognized it for what it was.

Out onto the bridge they trotted, when with a ripping crash the ties gave way beneath them. They grabbed for the rails which still hung aloft. Somehow they both slid unhurt to the ground, which was not more than ten feet beneath. Then they ran across the valley, up the farther bank, and onto the track once more.

The baying of the hounds came nearer and nearer behind them. At last the fleeing pair reached a gorge, through which rushed a mountain torrent. The sides were precipitous stone cliffs. The railroad track ended abruptly at the edge. On the rocks below there were a few twisted pieces of rail and some broken timbers.

The fugitives paused for breath at the edge. The baying behind them changed to a series of short sharp yelps.

Jack exulted, "The pack has lost the trail where we fell through that bridge. It 'll be several minutes before they find it again."

"No it won't," panted Larry. "Their human minds will lead them right to the spot where we landed."

And he was right, for even as he was speaking, the full-throated baying commenced again.

"Then let's fool their minds, in a

way that wouldn't fool a real dog," suggested Blakeslee. "Let's cross this stream, and *not* hit the railroad again on the other side."

"Let's not even cross," added Larry. "This river runs under the Morton road, so we can stay on this side, and still get to Morton's."

Quickly they clambered down the face of the cliff into the swirling water below, floundered along with the current for some distance, and then laboriously scaled the cliff again at a point on the same side about a hundred yards downstream from where they had entered the water.

The pack of hounds was rapidly coming down the old railroad. The two lay concealed in a thicket, watching tensely.

Presently four huge bloodhounds appeared at the edge of the ravine. The dogs didn't even hesitate. Scrambling down the face of the cliff, they obliquely forded the stream, landing just about opposite the hiding place of the two boys.

The dogs had considerable difficulty in getting up the other cliff, but at last they made it, and in full cry as though actually on the trail again, they dashed upstream along the cliff-top.

The two fugitives melted into the woods, and rapidly made their way downstream, on the opposite bank from their Whoomang bloodhound pursuers.

An excited yelping behind them indicated that the bloodhounds had reached the continuation of the railroad track, and had found no scent of their quarry. Jack and Larry chuckled, as they ran on.

The yelping ceased, and an ominous silence ensued.

"I don't like that," remarked Larry. "They're up to something."

"They're letting their dog-sense work now," replied Jack. "Now we're in for trouble."

EVEN as he spoke, one deep-throated bay broke from the woods behind them, followed by yelpings at several widely separated points.

"Run!" exclaimed Larry. "Our only hope now is to reach Morton's ahead of them."

The two fugitives dodged through the trees as fast as they could. But there was no path here; the low-running hounds had the advantage, and rapidly gained on them.

The pair reached a thick wall of brush. Frantically pushing their way through it, they emerged upon a road!

Coming down the road toward them from their left was a touring car. Jumping into the middle of the road, they held up their right hands as a signal for the car to stop; but the driver merely honked his horn, and did not diminish his speed. The dogs were nearly upon them.

The two men, as though impelled by a single thought, whipped out their guns, and leveled them at the oncoming car. Larry fired, and his bullet shattered the windshield. The car came to a grinding stop.

"Quick! Give us a lift!" shouted Larry.

The man obligingly opened the door; but as Larry clambered in, he felt something hard and cylindrical pressed against his ribs, and a voice barked in his ear, "One word, and I'll drill you! Now hand over that gat!"

Larry handed it over.

Jack meanwhile, counting on his friend to attend to the man in the car, had wheeled around with his back to them, and was intently watching the edge of the road, with weapon raised.

At that instant a hound's head, and two clawing forepaws, made their appearance through the thicket. *Crack!* went Jack's pistol, and the dog pitched forward into the ditch, to twitch there convulsively for a few moments, and then lie still.

With a pleased smile, Jack turned around. Then his face fell, for he was looking into the muzzle of the automatic of the driver of the car.

But, as the driver pointed his gun at Jack, this left Jack's partner uncovered. Instantly, Larry leaped upon the man and seized his gun-arm.

Jack swung up his own automatic and shouted, "I've got the drop on *you*, now!"

The driver of the car subsided.

But, at that instant three dogs clawed their way through the bushes. Jack gained the car with one jump. Then the bloodhounds were upon them.

Larry wrenched the gun from the man's hand, and buried its muzzle in the man's neck.

"Start the car!" he commanded.

The man obeyed. As the automobile started, the three dogs made a frantic attempt to scramble over the side of the car, and get at the three men.

Larry shifted his gun to his left hand, and caught one of the brutes a blow on the snout with his right fist, spilling it off into the road. Jack shot one of the others through the head. The third dog jumped off, and went sliding into the ditch, from which it picked itself up and joined its sole surviving companion.

As the car sped up, and rounded a turn the two bloodhounds could be seen standing at the top of a rise, gazing after the departing men.

A little farther on, the motor began to sputter and miss, and finally died altogether. The car coasted to a stop.

"What's the matter?" snapped Jack.

"Search me," replied the driver, unconcernedly.

"You're faking!" Larry charged menacingly.

The two dogs came in sight, loping down the road behind them, but stopped just out of range of their guns.

"Get this car going!" exclaimed Larry, exasperated. "We've got to escape from those damned bloodhounds."

The man looked back.

"Say, what is this, anyhow?" he asked. "Uncle Tom's Cabin? Or are you runaway convicts?"

"Neither!" snapped Jack. "But you'd better get us to Morton's in a hurry if you know what's good for you."

"Say!" exclaimed the man. "You aren't planning to hold up Blackstone Kent, are you?"

"I should say not!" replied Larry, in a tone that carried conviction. "He's a friend of ours! We're hurrying there for protection!"

"Then why didn't you say so before?" exclaimed the man. "I'm Kent's chauffeur. Let's go."

Whereupon he started up the supposedly stalled car, and soon they were on their way again, with the two hounds loping behind, just out of range.

THE man actually was Blackstone Kent's chauffeur. On their arrival at Morton's, Kent listened with intent interest to their adventures.

"I guess there can be no doubt now," he commented, when they had finished, "as to the caliber of the criminals with whom we are dealing."

"You know," confessed Jack Blakeslee, "I must admit that I thought at first that Larrabee's story was all a hop-

dream, so I went into the thing just for the fun of it. But my doubts were knocked out of me, pretty soon after we crashed. Say, you should have seen those hell-hounds! They were positively human!"

"What about Helyn?" interrupted Larry, suddenly remembering.

Blackstone Kent's face sobered.

"I haven't heard any news of her yet," said he.

"Then it's me for Bretton Woods!" exclaimed Blakeslee.

"What for?" asked Larry.

"To get another plane."

But Blackstone Kent sadly shook his head.

"It's no use," said he. "I've figured out what that searchlight thing must be. It stopped your motor. It must be the same as the ignition-interfering ray, which the French Army were reported as having perfected several years ago. A band of criminals, who can transmit persons through space by wireless in the way that Eliot Endicott's letter mentioned, and who can put human intelligence into pigeons and bloodhounds, may very likely be able to stall an airplane motor."

Blakeslee, however, instead of appearing downcast at this pronouncement, actually brightened up.

"Jove! I have it!" he exclaimed. "I'll borrow Carson's plane."

"One plane would be as bad as another," Kent lugubriously admitted.

"Not Carson's," replied the young aviator, "for his is a Packard."

"What difference does that make?"

The airman surveyed the older man with a look of tolerant amusement.

"A Packard," said he, "has a Diesel engine."

"Well?"

"Don't you understand? A Diesel engine has no ignition, so this ray can't bother it!"

"Yea!" exclaimed Larry, jumping to his feet. "Let's go!"

Kent's face suffused with interest and hope.

"My man will drive you right over to Bretton Woods," said he warmly.

It was late in the afternoon when the two men reached Bretton Woods. Carson was still there, and Blakeslee readily obtained the loan of his plane for the morrow. Blakeslee and Larrabee then spent the evening fraternizing with the aviators and attendants of the Mount Washington flying field, but never a word did the two adventurers breathe of what had happened that day, or of what they suspected was ahead of them.

They spent the night at one of the hotels. For two days it rained, and they fretted and fumed and killed time. They phoned frequently to Mr. Kent, but he still had received no clew as to Helyn's whereabouts. During the third night of their stay at Bretton Woods, the weather cleared.

Bright and early the next morning, Carson took them out to the field and gave Blakeslee a short trial flight in the Diesel-motored plane. Then they came down, Carson surrendered his seat to Larrabee, and Jack and Larry soared up and away to the eastward.

As they took off, Larry said dubiously, "I hope that you're right about that ray not being able to stall a Diesel engine, for if it can, we are sure out of luck!"

IT was not long before they sighted the Jones Lumber Camp ahead of them. But what a different scene from that of their last visit!

As they came into view, all was activity. Men ran to lock all the fence

gates. Quite a number of others climbed to the top of the watch-tower. A crowd gathered in front of one of the buildings!

Then the siren sounded a single blast, and the men sprang away from the boundary fence. The pseudo-searchlight on the tower-top trained its invisible beam on the oncoming plane. By the side of the searchlight, there stood two men with machine guns.

"We're in for a hot reception," remarked Jack. "They are evidently expecting us. If we crash inside the fence, it's good night for us! And look at the audience that's come out to witness our finish!"

Pulling his joy-stick quickly backward as he approached the camp, he rose at a sharp angle. The searchlight was now turned full upon them, and yet their motor never missed a beat.

"Good old Diesel!" exclaimed Jack. "And will you look at the masquerade!"

In the midst of the "audience" there were a huge slate-gray winged dragon, a black ant as large as a horse, and a golden female statue swathed in clinging robes of blue. Close beside the statue stood a young man. All the others of the crowd were at a respectful distance from these four. And then the statue moved, and appeared to be speaking to the young man beside it.

"Why, she's alive!" shouted Larry.

At just this moment, one of the machine guns on the tower-top cut loose at the oncoming plane. A gash of red appeared on the side of Jack's head, and the plane, relieved of his guidance, suddenly plunged forward and down, straight at the tower.

It was amusing to see the rapidity and consternation with which the occupants of the tower dropped searchlight and both machine guns, and flattened themselves upon the platform. One of the men even dived off into space, and striking the ground below, remained crumpled and motionless where he landed.

But Larry was in no mood for humor. Although he knew nothing of flying, he seized the auxiliary stick and yanked it backward; and the plane, responding, just barely cleared the tower.

Jack dazedly sat up, wiped the blood out of his eyes with the back of one hand, and looked around. Then, realizing the situation, he grasped the control-stick, and leveled the ship.

Circling, he headed back for the camp once more. But the men on the tower had had enough, and were rapidly descending its spiral staircase, in spite of the angry shouts of a man on the ground. The dragon, the antman, and the golden girl and her male companion had disappeared.

The two men flew over the camp as low as the trees would permit, studying all possible details, but no one offered them any further violence. The morale of the enemy appeared to have been thoroughly wrecked.

Several times the flyers circled round and round across the camp, and then when they had satisfied themselves that they had seen all that was visible, they headed for Bretton Woods.

Jack's head was bleeding pretty freely, but he insisted that it was only a scratch.

CHAPTER XII.

IN LEAGUE WITH THE ENEMY.

AT Bretton Woods, they turned the plane back to Carson, adjured him to keep his mouth shut about Jack's wound, and hurried to Kent's car.

"Wasn't that golden girl a prize bathing beauty?" Jack exclaimed as they drove away from the landing-field.

"Yes," assented his friend. "But did you notice who was with her?"

"Who?"

"The missing Eliot Endicott!"

"Did you see any sign of the Kent girl?"

"Not a trace," replied Larry sadly, and lapsed into silence.

Blackstone Kent was awaiting them in the driveway at Morton's.

"We've found Eliot Endicott!" they shouted, as they drove up.

But their host's face registered no joy.

"Helyn has been found," he said dully.

"Alive?" said the two in unison.

"Yes," said Blackstone Kent.

Then why the gloom? Sobered and puzzled, they got out of the car.

"She's upstairs asleep now," Blackstone Kent continued. "She seems to be a little out of her mind. The police found her wandering dazedly in the fields about thirty miles from here. She knows who she is, but not very much more. And she has absolutely no recollection where she has been or what she has been doing the past four days."

Larrabee and Blakeslee were too shocked and horrified to make any comment, but went inside, where Jack's wound was dressed.

Helyn came down from her nap, much rested, and apparently perfectly well. Her father was greatly relieved. True, she could remember nothing which had happened from the time she had entered the post office four days ago to the morning of the present day. But apart from this bit of amnesia, her mind now appeared perfectly clear. The three men decided that it would do no harm to approach her gently on the subject of Eliot Endicott's letter. In fact, to mention to her the letter might result in restoring her memory of the intervening events.

So the two visitors were introduced to the girl. Larry then, with his best Irish ingratiatory manner, told the girl how he had frantically tried to find out who she was on the train, how he had gone beyond his station in order to get off with her at Bartlett, and how he had mooned around Bartlett all one day in the hope of catching a glimpse of her.

Through all the narration, she watched him with an amused but slightly embarrassed smile. But when he mentioned seeing her open a letter in the post office, she became visibly agitated.

"I remember getting the letter," said she, "but not its contents. I don't remember a thing further. There must have been some terrible news in that letter. Maybe that's what's the matter with me."

"Can't you recollect a single bit of the contents?" urged her father. "Think. Think hard!"

But the girl shook her head sadly, positively.

At a sign from Blackstone Kent, Larry at once cut in with, "The letter was from your cousin, Eliot Endicott."

"How do you know?" exclaimed Helyn, wheeling and facing him. Then steadying herself with an effort, she said dully, "But it couldn't have been. Eliot has disappeared. Probably he has been killed. He couldn't write anybody a letter."

"Miss Kent," persisted Larry, "I read that letter over your shoulder in the post office. I read every word of it."

But she shook her head, with nar-

rowed eyes. Said she, "Don't think me rude, but I don't believe it. You can't prove it."

Then she bit her lip, as though she wished she had not spoken in just that way.

"Miss Kent," said Larry, "I have the envelope of that letter. Your cousin's handwriting can be easily identified."

"What!" she gasped. "Where is it?"

Larry felt in several of his pockets. Then his face fell.

"It's still under the towel on top of the dresser in the Bartlett hotel," said he.

"We must get it at once!" exclaimed Kent. "Come on, I'll drive you down. Mr. Blakeslee, you stay with Helyn."

"He needn't bother," said the girl, listlessly. "I feel tired, with all this excitement. I think I'll lie down again."

Kissing her father dutifully, she dragged herself upstairs.

"Watch her, Blakeslee," whispered Kent. "Come on, Larrabee."

SOON they were speeding to town in Kent's car.

"Do you know, Larrabee," asserted Kent, when they were well on their way, "Helyn was lying to us."

"What makes you think so?" demanded Larry in surprise.

"I'm a lawyer," the older man explained, "and I have had a lifetime of experience in studying the behavior of witnesses on the stand. I can tell almost infallibly, from the manner of a witness, whether or not he is telling the truth; and I am sure that Helyn was lying. Oh, Mr. Larrabee, it's terrible! My little girl never lied to me before! Why did she? What is the matter with her?"

They drove the rest of the way to Bartlett in silence, each immersed in gloomy thoughts.

At the hotel, they ascertained from the clerk that Room 31 had not been occupied since Larry's departure, so they obtained the key, and hurried up.

But the envelope was not under the towel on the top of the dresser. The towel was the same old towel, all right, for Larry recognized a peculiarly shaped hole in one corner, which had attracted his attention before. But the letter was gone. Kent asked the clerk to send for the chambermaid, but she denied having taken any envelope. In fact, she hadn't even emptied the wastebasket since Mr. Larrabee was there.

As a last resort, they started hunting through the drawers; and when they opened a certain one of those in the bureau, out flew a small brown moth, accompanied by a rather putrid smell. The moth flew straight through the open crack of the window, and disappeared. The rank smell proved to emanate from the dead body of a pigeon lying in the drawer.

It was the spying pigeon which Larry had killed by throwing a tumbler at it, and whose body he had then examined, and thrust into the drawer, and promptly forgotten. Now he fished it out gingerly, and showed it to Kent, pointing to the strange scar which he had noticed before on the back of its head.

But now, in place of the scar, there was a round open hole. The two men discussed this phenomenon, but they could make nothing out of it, and so they resumed their search for the envelope. But it was nowhere to be found.

"The Jones Lumber Camp crowd have undoubtedly got it," opined Larrabee, "but when and how?"

On their way back to Morton's, the conversation finally shifted to the pigeon again.

"As a lawyer," announced Kent, "I never let go of any bit of evidence, no matter how irrelevant it may seem, and so I can't help feeling that the opening of that scar in the pigeon's head had some bearing on the mystery of the uncanny mentality of the bird. Have you noticed any similar scar or hole in any other animal recently?"

Larry's face suddenly lighted up with a forgotten recollection.

"The cat!" he exclaimed. "The black cat, which nobody owned, and which sat in my room while I was talking to Jack Blakeslee. I can't swear that it had such a scar, but I remember now that there was a small spot on the back of its head where the fur looked a bit ragged. Why, perhaps the cat was a spy, too! That would account for the fact that the Jones outfit was expecting us when we flew over their lumber camp the first time."

"Then we must keep our eyes peeled for animals with scars," said Kent.

BACK at Morton's once more, Blakeslee met them at the gate; and he was visibly agitated.

"I'm going to talk to you right here, out in the open, where no one can possibly overhear us," he said. "Are there any animals within earshot?"

All three men glanced carefully around them, but saw none. Then Jack continued, "Of course, you didn't get the envelope."

"You know where it is?" asked Larry eagerly, but his friend shook his head.

"No," said he, "but listen till I tell you what happened here after you two left. It suddenly occurred to me that, as the enemy always seem to know our plans as fast as we make them, they might easily beat you to the hotel. So I rushed to the phone, to call up the hotel clerk, and ask him to get the envelope and hold it until you reached there. But Miss Helyn was already on the line, on an extension set upstairs, I guess."

Kent started. Then nodded.

Blakesless continued, "As I cut in, she was just saying, 'Aaron, dear, get some one to the hotel quick. The envelope of the Eliot Endicott letter is under the towel on the top of the dresser in Room 31. Father and Larrabee are on the way there for it right now. Hurry!' Then a man's voice said, 'Yes, dear. Thanks.' That was all. They both hung up, and I naturally tried all the more frantically to phone the hotel. But I couldn't even raise central. The line seemed to have gone dead."

"Cut, undoubtedly," remarked Kent grimly. "Let's see."

But central promptly answered, "Numbah, plee-uz."

So whatever had been the matter with the line had been purely temporary.

"Who is this Aaron person?" asked Larry. "That ought to give us a clew."

"So far as I am aware," Kent replied sadly, "my daughter knows no one of that name."

It was easy to see that he was deeply shocked by the proof of his daughter's perfidy.

They went inside. Helyn greeted them almost gayly.

"Did you bring the envelope?" she asked, impishly.

"No," admitted Larry.

"I rather thought there wasn't any such letter," she asserted, with a smile.

None of the three men cared to press the point.

After supper, Larry took Helyn for a walk. She played up to him in her prettiest manner. The night was glamorous. The girl was so solicitously interested in his recent adventures, that he found it difficult to withhold any information. He did not want to be rude, and yet he strove constantly to remember that she was in some way, and for some unknown reason, linked with the enemy.

It hardly seemed possible. Was he not letting his imagination get away with itself?

He cudgelled his mind for some plausible explanation of her behavior. Almost he succeeded in persuading himself that she was merely playing a joke; that this "Aaron" person was merely some friend of hers; and that she had sent him to steal the envelope, just so that she could say "I told you so." But then there came to the reporter a realization that this explanation, although exonerating to her morality, was positively damning to her mentality, for no girl in her right mind would joke about so serious a matter as the kidnapping of her cousin.

Jealousy prompted Larry to demand of her who this man "Aaron" was, and what he meant in her life, but he wisely stayed his tongue.

But, all in all, the walk was a very pleasant one for him, and his companion didn't succeed in pumping much information out of him. When they returned to the house, however, Larry felt suddenly let down, dissatisfied. Helyn had been just a little too forward, too easy, unlike the girl on the train as he had pictured her.

When they entered the Morton house again, and he took a good hard look at her in the light, her face was not quite the keen fresh face which he remembered. Beautiful, yes; and yet there was a certain coarseness about it. Surely it hadn't been like that?

WHILE the two were out, walking in the moonlight, Blackstone Kent had put in a long distance call for Boston, and had informed the surprised district attorney that his missing assistant had been located, and to send operatives at once.

After Helyn had gone to bed, the three men discussed the latest developments. Kent told what he had done.

"Then I must notify the *Post*," exclaimed Larry, jumping up and making for the phone. "If my own paper gets scooped on some news that I myself dug up, why—"

"I'm sorry," said the lawyer, "but it is out of the question. I made the district attorney—he's a very good friend of mine—agree to give out no statement for the present. When he finally does so, he will give it out exclusively through you."

"You're a brick!" said Larry, sitting down again.

"Besides," added Kent, "the telephone is out of order again, and it's I who did the disconnecting this time."

"When will the men from the Department be here?" asked Blakeslee.

"They are taking the night sleeper," replied the lawyer. "They should reach Bretton Woods early to-morrow and join us in a raid on the Jones Lumber Camp."

"But what can three detectives do against that outfit?" objected Larry.

"It will not be merely three detectives," Kent smiled, "but the government of the United States. I hardly believe that the Jones Lumber Camp will care to defy openly one hundred and twenty million people."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Every Man to His Trade

It takes a skillful man to be a good hand logger in the virgin forests of British Columbia—but Dave Reynolds had never faced such a momentous and breath-taking test as this

By ROBERT E. PINKERTON

Émile swayed gracefully on the logger's cable

WITH the last stroke of his ax, Dave Reynolds knew he had done it; knew the great cedar would never lose motion from that first whispering sway of its top until it wallowed in the sea far below.

The tree had been a challenge since he began work in the inlet. To "fall" it, and save it intact as a piece of merchantable timber, entailed an operation that would be as delicate, and must be as accurate, as a twenty-foot putt on a rolling green, his club an ax, the ball fifteen tons of hurtling forest giant.

As a hand logger, Dave was of necessity a skilled engineer, though ignorant of the mathematics of engineering, of the exact measurement of weights, stresses, and forces. Falling trees is a matter of instinctive feeling, as one finds the knob of his bedroom door in the dark or shifts noiselessly from high to second at twenty-five miles an hour.

Blueprints or logarithmic tables cannot help a man to determine the exact instant in that terrific swing of a tree when the ax must release the last restraining fibers and let the resistless force of gravity have full sway.

Perhaps it was because he was young that Dave accepted the cedar's

challenge. The tree, nearly two hundred feet high and seven through, leaned far to the right, would naturally fall on a shoulder of rock which would shatter it. But if he swung it too far to the left it would snap off a dead cedar stub and the top would bury itself so firmly in a depression there could be no hope of getting the log into the water.

Dave's problem was to cause the tree to swing just far enough to miss the rock, strike the stub at an acute angle, and so low that the stiff, dead stump would survive the shock and deflect the huge cedar on the rebound into the only possible path to the sea.

He calculated while he undercut and sawed, pausing often to estimate distances, angles and forces; but in the end it was a feeling, a sensing, a delicacy of touch with ax and wedge, that permitted him to control stupendous energy, to guide fifteen tons as surely as if he were pushing over a rotten fence post.

The tree shot without pause from stump to salt water, but Dave did not know until the next day that it struck the stub at the precise angle and exactly where he had planned. The great top mowed all before it, crushing its lesser fellows or sweeping them aside, cutting a gash in the forest, and through that gash Dave caught a glimpse of a gas boat out in the inlet.

The boat's existence might not have registered in that absorbing moment of triumph had not smoke and flame burst through its deck. Then the trees swung back and hid the blazing craft.

BEFORE the cedar struck the ground, Dave was leaping down the mountainside. Tumbling, rolling, bounding into thick saplings, angling off to the left where he had moored his skiff, he made for the beach without reckoning anything but time.

Once there, he spared himself only a glance while shoving off his waterlogged, shaky old rowboat. Black smoke billowed from amidships. A man on deck was struggling with a dinghy, but heat forced him from the davits to his companions, huddled on the after deck. Dave drove toward them, standing and pushing on the oars, hand logger fashion. He saw women on the blazing craft; then knives of flame sliced the delicate tissue of his lungs.

What manner of people they were, or how many, he did not know. He was too intent, in those few torturing moments, on cramming them into his rowboat and then departing with the same urge that had sent him down the mountainside. Seconds assumed the value of gems, and he appraised them correctly. He and his boatload of refugees were not fifty feet away when the gas tank let go, tearing out the side of the boat and showering the water with flaming gasoline.

"Hey, Fish! Could you swim in that?" one of the men called from the stern of his rowboat.

A girl in the bow started at being addressed, but made no reply. Dave, rowing more slowly now, looked at her with quick interest, then turned curiously to the others. They were beaten and scared, a dreary lot, and in vain the hand logger tried to find in the lined and haggard faces some indication of the qualities that had so charmed him when he saw the troupe of actors at Chance Cove two months before. The graceful girl who had been called the Fish was the only one he could identify.

"I'll say the show's closed!" another woman laughed callously.

The voice rasped. Her cheeks were pinkly unreal, the grained texture of imitation leather, her hair as glaringly preposterous. She began suddenly to chew gum with a sort of ferocity.

"I been stranded before," came in heavy tones from the stern, "but I always saved my clothes and had a chance to walk."

"What you lose? A Tux!" broke in another man coldly. "Me—I'm out three thousand dollars' worth of—"

"Junk!" The word burst like flame from between jaws tightly clenched on the gum.

Dave looked back. A man with heavy shoulders, thick chest and long, strong fingers was gazing tranquilly across the water. His face was round and almost expressionless, his eyes the thin blue of an often-washed gingham dress.

"Three thousand dollars' worth," he repeated, "of the finest magician's—"

"I allus said Kelton shouldn't smoke around that engine."

"I wasn't. And I told Gabby the tank leaked."

"You lie. You never—"

"Gabby's held out enough on us this summer to buy a hundred new tanks," the grotesquely-hued woman declared virulently.

"You're a dirty liar, Le Roy. I'm in the red on this show."

DAVE REYNOLDS rowed slowly on. The breath of death had awed them only for a moment. They would have died horribly. Now they bickered and reviled.

Only the girl known as the Fish remained silent. It was she who had dived from the roof of the Chance Cove warehouse the afternoon before the show. For two months Dave had only to close his eyes to see her, to recall the startlingly beautiful flash of her body and the joyous laugh as she hurled herself into the chill British Columbia water.

"Say, feller! Where you taking us?" Gabby demanded as they rounded a point and saw a float house nestling in a small, cliff-sheltered cove.

"Not to Vancouver," the hand logger answered indifferently, "or even to Alert Bay."

"That's where we want to go—Vancouver."

"You'll get there—in time. My gas boat's gone, having the cylinders rebored. This skiff's too shaky to stand crossing the Sound. A boat will stop by next week."

"Next week!" shrieked the gum-chewing Le Roy woman.

"And us booked for every night!"

"Let Gabby worry. He loses all we could steal."

Dave rowed faster as water rose in his rotting, overloaded craft. He watched the Fish, perched in the bow. Youth, a clear skin, soft eyes, and, above all, her silence set her sharply apart from the others; but his memories had already done that. Now he could only wonder how fate had trapped her with this sordid crew.

They clambered onto the float of cedar logs which supported Dave's two-room cabin. The women, sensing a scarcity of comfort, stampeded through the open door to grab what they could. The men followed, as eager to preëmpt the best places.

"Thank you," a soft voice sounded in Dave's ear as he arose from making the painter fast. "We wouldn't have had a chance."

It was the only recognition of the rescue he was ever to receive from that group. The Fish was smiling, a wist-

fully brave attempt to show her gratitude. He wanted to tell her how he had watched her dive at Chance Cove, but as he felt for the words Le Roy's hoarse whisper came through the thin shake walls.

"My Gawd, what a dump!"

The diving girl winced, but Dave's eyes twinkled. "Wait until the three of 'em start scrapping over the one bed," he whispered.

Le Roy darted from the door and brushed past the Fish. She slipped a thin, bony hand into Dave's, leaned against him, smirked up into his face.

"Listen, dearie," she began with ghastly coquetry. "You wouldn't want me to sleep on the floor, would you? Tell 'em the bed's mine."

Dave grinned over her head at the diving girl, but before he could answer, Gabby thrust Le Roy aside.

"Here's how it stands, feller," he announced importantly. "We're show folks. Booked 'way ahead. Every day we stay here we're out a lot o' money. See? So here's what I want. You get to some logging camp or cannery and tell 'em to send a boat for us. I'll pay you—"

Small, sharp-featured, so obviously a cheap trickster, the manager glanced from Dave's worn work clothes to the unpainted cabin, back again. "I'll pay you five dollars," he said.

"It's not worth that much—an hour," Dave answered soberly.

"Quit kiddin', feller. Five for the trip."

"I ran a cedar just when you came along," he said in quiet explanation. "Took me a day and a half. It 'll scale six thousand, number one. I make seventy-five dollars clear."

Gabby smirked patronizingly. "You win. I pay ten. And to show you I'm right, I'll go along and help row."

"Skeep out, eh?" The magician, he of the pale blue eyes, crowded forward. "Owing me six weeks' salary! You little t'ief. Think you cheat Émile?"

His long fingers gripped the manager's shoulder. A terrible rage blazed in the pale eyes. Gabby was hurled crashing against the cabin. Half stunned, he would have been easy prey for the raised fist.

"STEADY," Dave warned quietly, as he stepped between the two. "I'm beginning to think I took too many off that gas boat."

"You speak so to Émile?" the man snarled.

"I don't know what 'so' is, but I'm speaking, and to all of you. You're here for a week. I didn't ask you to come, but I did think you were sort of lucky to get here. There's the house. The floor's been slept on before. If the grub runs out there's fish and maybe a deer. That's how she lies."

"That logging camp where we were going to show to-night, it can't be far," Gabby protested.

"Closed down. Tug towed it out last week. I'm alone in the inlet, and I never did aim to run a hotel. But you're here, and I'll do the best I can."

The hand logger pushed indifferently through the group and entered the kitchen, where he built a fire.

"Which one's going to do the cooking?" he demanded, as he reappeared in the doorway. "Time to take hold."

He looked at the four women, but no one spoke. All were staring at Émile, who had sat down on the woodpile beneath the shed. When he felt the others' gaze he lifted his head and deliberately studied the face of each.

"So you come to Émile again!" he exclaimed with a contempt that was softened by suppressed elation. "When

the motor stops, it's 'Émile can fix it.' When the props need mending, it's 'Émile, please.' When there is no money as we leave Vancouver and all are hungry, it is 'Émile, you always have a few dollars.' The rest of the time you spit in Émile's face."

The recital had become passionless.

"All summer you have eaten in logging camps and canneries. When it was necessary to eat on the boat it was from cans. Swill! If you had been kind to Émile!"

Vanity and elation possessed him completely now. "Émile will cook, but only if there are no complaints and if—" he paused, and Dave Reynolds saw a crafty, piggish light in his eyes—"if La Feesh is his assistant."

An instinctive protest formed on Dave's lips, an answer to the diving girl's quick look of repugnance. The others gathered around her.

"Be a sport, kid."

"Help him put on his act."

She thrust them aside with her strong young arms. "All right. Quit pawing at me."

THE man could cook. Dave failed to recognize his own simple stores in the miracles served. The others cannily bought future ease with extravagant, utterly insincere praise. Émile drank it like wine.

"When I have more time!" he cried. "This was something prepared quickly. To-morrow—ah!"

He stopped behind the bench on which the diving girl sat and put his hands on her shoulders. "La Feesh and Émile, they will show you."

Dave saw the girl stiffen. Revolt flared in her eyes, but when Émile bent and kissed the thick brown hair her face had become impassive. The others crowded outside. Dave slowly filled a pipe and when he followed he found Émile staring speculatively at the great cedar logs lying inside the boomsticks.

For a moment the hand logger wondered if Émile alone realized what those logs meant, each "run" from mountainside to the sea, towed laboriously home behind the rowboat. Then the man whirled excitedly toward the others.

"A new wonder for you!" he shouted. "You have seen Émile with the magic, the tumbling, the living statues, the one-man band, the cards that think! At last the cooking! And now!"

He darted out across the huge logs, solid as a floor, to a steel cable stretched tightly from the boomsticks to the top of a rock rising ten feet above the water. There he stooped, examined the fastening, glanced inquiringly toward Dave.

"It's solid, if that's what's worrying you," the hand logger laughed. "The tide swings in here pretty strong on the flood, and I rigged that to hold the boom against it. The rock's covered at high water."

Émile nodded, took off his shoes and then, in his stockinged feet, suddenly darted out upon the cable, stopped abruptly, whirled, bowed and threw kisses to the group on the float.

"'Ray, Émile!" they cried, clapping violently.

"That's a wow, boy!"

"*Encore!*"

Covertly they sneered to each other. "Old stuff! Give him a hand and he'll cook better."

But Dave Reynolds watched spellbound. Émile did things on that swaying cable the hand logger could not do on a cement pavement. He pivoted in a waltz, skipped lightly along, turned a back somersault, held the toes of one

foot while standing on the other and swinging the steel rope. In the end he suddenly became a *boulevardier,* strolling nonchalantly back to the logs.

Great as was his vanity, Émile's showman's instinct penetrated the falseness of his fellow-troupers' applause to recognize Dave Reynolds's genuine pleasure in the performance.

"You never suspect, my friend, what would happen when you string this cable, eh?" he called. "Now I will reward, perform for your benefit. There is a rifle in the cabin. Perhaps you have shot animals with it, standing on the firm earth. Bring it, and you will see more that Émile can do."

Dave sprang to get the weapon. Émile set a mark on a boomstick and when he reached the middle of the cable he started it swaying. But his back was toward the mark, the rifle pointing over his shoulder. From a vest pocket he drew a small mirror and lined up the sights. As he swung slowly he pulled the trigger and knocked the target into the water.

IF Émile had intended to stage a new show in the morning, the tide prevented. The rock was entirely submerged. Dave remained home from work. Even ungracious guests were an event in the lonely inlet, but by noon their sordid bickerings had driven him to his mountainside.

"Are they always like this?" he asked the diving girl as he cast off the skiff.

"They're better now. Cooped up in that little boat all summer—"

"Well, I don't have to listen to them, long's there's cedar standing."

Her impassivity was shattered. "Oh!" she cried hopefully, "would you take me along."

"Hop in," and he pulled away.

Dave wanted to say more, but that starved eagerness distressed him and he rowed out of the bay in silence. As they approached the point they heard a shout and turned to see Émile at the kitchen door.

"La Feesh! Come back here!" the magician commanded peremptorily.

Dave ceased rowing, and a shadow crossed the girl's face. Émile ran toward them across the boom.

"You hear me? Come back here, La Feesh!"

Dave looked inquiringly at the girl. Her eyes flashed. "Go on!" she commanded in a fierce whisper.

The hand logger threw himself against the oars, and grinned delightedly. A few strokes took them around the point, but they could still hear Émile's angry shouts. Dave frowned.

"What you let him talk to you like that for?" he demanded.

"How am I going to stop it?" she retorted.

"Of course, if he owns you—"

"He doesn't!" she cried fiercely. "I hate him. But you don't understand. He's terrible when he's angry. Most people think he's crazy."

"I'd like nothing better'n a chance to tame him," Dave growled. "He backed up quick enough when I pulled him off Gabby."

"But that didn't mean enough to him."

Dave did not comment. He was looking past her, up the inlet, and suddenly he began to row.

"Émile will have to wait," he chuckled. "That big cedar I cut yesterday—she was a 'stumper,' all right, only I didn't stop to find out. See it?"

A half mile away a huge log floated high in the water.

"Seventy-five dollars when she's in the boom," Dave explained. "I've got

to get her now before the ebb carries her out. Let Émile boil."

He threw all his weight against the oars. Heavy as the skiff was, it jumped with each stroke. The girl glanced back uneasily, then laughed.

"That's the idea!" Dave exclaimed. "I've remembered you all summer like that—laughing."

"All summer!" she repeated, startled.

"Since you showed at Chance Cove. You seemed to be having such a good time diving... How'd you get mixed up with that scum?"

It was like pricking a balloon. "Show-crazy," she answered in a flat tone. "Gabby saw me swimming at a Seattle beach. Offered me a job. Made lots of promises."

"Cured?"

"You don't know!" she cried. "Just to be away from them! To have it quiet and peaceful! No men pawing at you! No women—you saw Le Roy. The other two are 'most as bad."

Dave found himself exulting in the strength of her revulsion. He was swept by a swift desire to see her as she had been at Chance Cove, joyous and bubbling with laughter.

"Forget it," he advised gruffly. "You're free of them for the afternoon and—" Suddenly he was gentle, almost pleading. "I'll be working every day now. If you want to, if you won't get tired of it, you can come along."

"Tired of it!" she repeated. "I'd love to."

THEY swept past the huge butt of the cedar and the girl stared at it incredulously.

"You cut that—all alone?" she demanded.

"Sure. She was a 'stumper,' too. Stood four hundred feet above the salt chuck and she never stopped once."

"Oh, if I could see you do it!"

"What's to hinder? After we tow this one home there'll be time to get in a small one before supper."

He drove a steel dog near the jagged end where the top had been broken off, attached a line and began the slow, heavy task of towing the huge trunk.

As he rowed, a short stroke to take up the slack, a long pull against the dead weight of the log, the girl sat in the stern, facing him. She was laughing now, joyously, as he remembered her.

"What's your real name?" he demanded suddenly.

"Will you call me by it? I'm so sick of 'Fish.' It's Ruth, Ruth Morton... Did you ever go to the head of the inlet, among all those mountains? I think it's beautiful. The others—they hated it, the mountains and the sea and the woods. They were always laughing at me because I wanted to go fishing."

Dave alone in his inlet, the girl forced within herself by the sordidness of the show boat, each young, each starved for companionship—that slow, laborious journey of half a mile in an old leaky skiff became an interval of magic. There was something almost explosive in the sudden release of their spirits. Dave rowed without consciousness of the oars. Ruth was unaware of their approach to the point that hid the cabin.

They rounded it at last, starting a buzz of comment on the float. Dave turned the great log, maneuvered it so that it could be poled through a gap he made in the boomsticks. He had it halfway in when Émile came out of the cabin and strode toward them across the boom.

The man paused twenty feet away and looked from Ruth's sparkling eyes to the confident swing of the hand log-

ger's shoulders as he darted his pick pole into a boomstick. The exuberance of their hour together had not faded, and suddenly Émile's round face was distorted by rage.

"You little tramp!" he bellowed. "You run away from Émile, eh? Throw him down for this hick!"

Vileness flowed from his lips until fury choked him, and then he started toward her. Ruth screamed. "Dave! Dave!"

The hand logger dropped his pole. The huge log on which he stood swung free of its fellows. The butt was ten feet from the boomstick to which the skiff was tied. But Dave ran, swiftly as if he were on a pavement, and leaped across the gap. His calked shoes crunched into the boomstick, anchored him solidly, and he was facing Émile, three feet away.

Nor did he pause, or speak. A heavy, toil-roughened palm, at the end of an ax-stiffened arm, smacked full across the showman's face. The other flat hand followed, left a crimson patch.

"My Gawd, what a sockin'!" a woman screamed from the float.

Émile staggered back, roared, charged in, and again and again Dave slapped him, as deliberately as ever he swung an ax, slapped him until the smacking sound was echoed from the cliffs.

Once more Émile retreated, but Dave darted around him, striking swiftly, forcing him back across the logs, at last sending him off the boomstick into the salt chuck.

The red face came up, the pig eyes bright with terror.

"I can't swim!" Émile sputtered, and, struggling, he went down.

Dave took an oar from the skiff, held it out to the man when he reappeared, then dragged him in. A heavy hand on Émile's collar jerked him from the water onto the logs.

"Now, cooky," the hand logger said dispassionately, "you better get back to your kitchen and stay there. Next time you get fresh I'll hit you with this," and he held a big fist under Émile's nose.

"But, La Feesh—"

"Shut up. You've got to speak to her just once more. She went with me to get this log. Now she's going along while I cut down a cedar and run it. And to-morrow she's going again. And the next day, if she wants to."

Dave turned back to his work. Émile did not speak or move. Face still red, dripping clothes clinging to him, he was a woeful sight. Dave, glancing back, laughed.

"You'll find an undershirt and a pair of overalls in the shack," he said. "Better go get 'em on."

WHEN he had closed the boomstick he jumped into the boat and again rowed around the point.

"It's always that way with any of them from the wrong side of Europe," he laughed to Ruth. "They can't stand up and take it. If I'd slapped a white man, now—"

"But, Dave!" Ruth protested: "You don't know him!"

"I know all I need to know!" the young hand logger exulted. "I haven't had so good a time in years. I was all through with Émile after the first couple o' swings. The rest of that scum—I wouldn't even slap 'em. But every poke I took at Émile I was thinking of 'em, and how nice and polite they were when I yanked 'em off that gas boat and turned my shack into a hotel."

Ruth smiled. There was no escaping

the exuberance of his spirit, and as he stood there, shoving the heavy boat, he seemed invincible.

"Maybe," she admitted. "Only nobody's dared do such a thing."

Dave laughed. "It's time. How'd you come to be so scared of him?"

"I wasn't at first. Émile was nice to me, and now I remember the funny looks of the others. And after a little while he asked me to be his assistant in a new act. It's magic, and at least I could do that much—stand and hand him things. He's really been in 'big time.' I thought I was lucky, and then he began to change."

"Go on," and Dave nodded comprehendingly when she hesitated. "I watched when he went near you."

"I'd rather be dead than in his act!" she cried passionately. "Only — I've been afraid to tell him."

"Tell him to-night and I'll make him think it's grand news."

"But you don't know how mean and tricky and cruel he is. Gypsy and Russian and French and a lot of others mix in him, they say. Le Roy's been with him five years. Lots of nights I've hardly slept, thinking of things she's told me. He nearly killed a girl once—was in jail for it."

The horror in her eyes halted his confident remark.

"It was in Europe," Ruth rushed on. "Everybody in the show business knows it. Émile had a glass-blowing act, and when his assistant, a girl, was going to quit him he didn't say a word. But he called a rehearsal and wound a ribbon of melted glass around and around her arm."

"It's always girls, eh?" Dave growled. "Might know it, the way he took that slapping. But quit worrying. I'll take care of Émile if I have to go all the way to Vancouver to do it."

He turned shoreward, tied the skiff and led the way upward. Ruth, at his heels, was introduced to that startling change the British Columbia coast offers. They had been of the sea, floating in salt water, the inlet stretching for miles before them. One step and they were of the forest. Thick growth hid the water. Great cedars rose to a green roof. Sunlight sought vainly to reach the ground.

"Oh!" the diving girl gasped. "I never thought — it's so beautiful, Dave! I love it here."

THEY climbed upward in the coolness. Their feet made no sound in the heavy moss. For Ruth it was fairyland, and for Dave the familiar scene assumed an aspect wholly new and completely entrancing. She became for him again the flashing figure of the diving girl, when her smile had dimmed the sparkle of the spray.

He "stumped" a tree for her, a small one, sent it crashing down the slope exactly where he had planned, and it shot on across the beach and into the water. Ruth caught the sound of a splash beneath the tremendous reverberation.

"It's in!" she cried exultantly. "You did it, Dave! Let's go see."

She reached for his hand and they ran together, reckless of the slope, laughing joyously, until Ruth tripped. In mid-air, Dave threw an arm about her waist, grasped a sapling. His muscles were wrenched, but he hung on until their feet touched the moss. She was pressed closely to him. Her eyes, soft even in fright, looked up into his. For a long moment neither moved. Dave trembled a bit, suddenly released her.

They went on for a ways, slowly and in silence.

"Dave," she said in a low, husky voice. "I'm not afraid of Émile any more. I wouldn't be afraid of anything with you."

They let it rest there, this new swift thing that had come to them. It seemed too wonderful even to think of, something to be treasured secretly in those first moments of realization, yet in the heart of each was a certainty that only a word or a glance would summon either to the other's arms.

They towed the new log home, slipped it inside the boomsticks and rowed around to the float. The show people were gathered outside, most evidently awaiting the call to supper. As Dave made the boat fast, Émile came to the door.

"Ah, you are all here!" he cried jovially. "In a moment now."

The troupers grinned at Dave.

"If we'd had you with us this summer," Gabby whispered.

"It's what those knife-throwing wops need," Felton said bitterly. "Wish I had the weight."

"He's got sand—to take that and come up smiling," Dave chuckled. "And I'll bet he's outcooked himself."

Émile had, and he served the meal as a highly emotional artist presents his achievements. Even the troupers were awed by the excellence of the food. Dave, confident in his young strength, was moved by the same magnanimity that had prompted him to offer Émile dry clothes.

"It's going to be like eating sawdust after you go," he said.

"You are very just, my young friend," and Émile made a deep bow. "Big men do not hold the grudge. I admire you for it. And to La Feesh I wish to apologize. If she prefers to row the logs with you instead of practicing for our act"—he shrugged—"I am satisfied."

"She's not going to be in your act," Dave said bluntly.

"That makes Émile very sad, but it does not alter things. I wish only to be friends."

He reached a hand across the table. Ruth hesitated, then took it. Émile shook hands with Dave, too. "It makes me very happy to be forgiven!"

"Making up without a kiss!" Le Roy scoffed.

"No! No! Have you not seen? Dumb! Dumb! Come," and he swept his arms to include those on his side of the table. "Our little Feesh! Her eyes! The color! Only one thing can make that. See? Am I not right?"

Ruth blushed furiously and Dave found himself in sudden, uncomfortable confusion. But Émile, after a benevolent smile, quickly and deftly turned attention elsewhere. He was the buffoon, and made them laugh. With skill, and a huge delight therein, he built up great disappointment, and even pity for himself, with a tale of a ruined dessert, and then set before them a mouth-watering triumph.

IN the end he led them away from the table without thought of his humiliation of the afternoon, while his own intoxication demanded added achievement. Outside, his eyes sought the cable, and he stared at it with swelling chest.

Felton nudged Le Roy. "Give us another treat, Émile," he called.

"But I am getting older. It is a long time since I was with the circus."

"Old my eye!" Gabby retorted.

Émile beamed upon him. "Very well," he said, and walked onto the logs.

It wasn't new, his imitation of a

drunken man, but it was done with such perfect pantomimic art that the hard-bitten members of the audience burst into real applause, and in the end Dave unconsciously paid the highest tribute.

"I forgot he was on the cable!" he exclaimed.

Émile, swelling with pride, sought to win them further, only to fail with half his trick rifle shots. In a sudden rage he ran out to the rock, laid the weapon down, and attempted new stunts on the cable.

But the first success could not be duplicated, and at last he walked onto the logs. He stood there thoughtfully a moment, then whirled excitedly to his audience.

"Years ago I did an act!" he cried. "Le Roy, come and help me."

"You're crazy!" the woman retorted. "I can't swim."

"But there is no harm in it. Even if I should drop you, there is our friend Dave with his boat. No? You don't trust Émile?"

He looked at the others. "It was but to carry her on my shoulders. She need only have kept quiet."

"What's the matter with the Fish?" Gabby asked.

Émile brightened as he turned to Ruth. "If she but would!"

"Go on, kid."

"What if you did fall in? You'd only be home."

"Help him out."

Ruth drew back and glanced at Dave. His eyes were laughing as he lounged carelessly against the cabin. He was so big and strong, so unafraid. His very strength challenged her courage.

Émile bowed and helped her gallantly. "You have only not to move," he said. "I have taught you to hold your body rigid when I held you. That is all."

He tossed her up lightly, balanced her upon his head, one hand gripping her ankles, and ran out upon the cable, where he whirled, danced back and forth, bent to one knee, set the cable to swaying, at last returned to the logs and gently set her down.

"I was but testing her nerves," he said when the applause died. "She is perfect for the rôle. Has no fear. Now for the difficult feat!"

Every word and gesture was that of the born showman. The mannerisms of the acrobat, the little spurs to suspense, the maddening false starts—he used them all before he suddenly whirled Ruth to his head and dashed out over the water. He reached the center of the cable, but did not pause. On to the rock he sped, there swung Ruth's rigid body down and laid it at his feet.

There were swift movements of his hands as he knelt over her, then he sprang erect and struck an attitude.

"What's there in that?" Gabby sneered.

"Dave! Dave!" Ruth screamed.

The cry snapped the hand logger off the float onto the logs, but he did not comprehend. Émile still maintained the attitude of performer who has just finished a difficult trick.

"Dave!" Ruth called again. "He's tied me to the rock!"

ACTORS and hand logger alike, the terror in her voice gripped them, but still they did not understand. Émile was bowing as if to applause, his round face distorted by an expansive smile.

"The little fool's lost her nerve," Gabby sneered. "Nothing can happen to her."

"Dave! Dave!"

Ruth was struggling violently to free herself. Dave could understand that, and it drove him to blind action. He sprang across the logs to the cable.

"You grinning devil!" he shouted. "Untie her and bring her back. What do you want to scare her like that for?"

Émile was grinning, fiendishly. But when Dave spoke his lips drew back in a horrible snarl.

"You slap Émile, eh?" he shouted. "You would steal La Feesh! But did you think you could go free? Did she think she could spit so in Émile's face?"

He stooped suddenly, pointed to a small shoulder of the rock just above the surface.

"Watch that, you thing of arms and back and no brain!" he shouted exultantly. "See the water climb over it so slowly but so surely. The tide! Can your strong arms stop that?"

Ruth again struggled at the bonds which held her wrists fast to the ring bolt that anchored the cable.

"Dave!" she screamed. "Dave!"

Émile looked at her speculatively, then took bits of cord from a pocket and bound her more securely.

"See?" he cried when he had finished. "She can no longer move. And the tide! It rises! It rises!"

But Dave was running back to the float. He cast loose his skiff and shoved off, slammed the oars into the locks. Behind him Le Roy screeched. "Come back! The rifle!"

He only drove the boat harder, out around the boom and down toward the rock. Émile had picked up the weapon and stood waiting.

The strong flood aided Dave and he rowed with all his strength. Suddenly the rifle leaped, barked twice. Dave felt a stinging sensation in his palms and lurched to keep his balance. He stared at his oars. The blades had been shattered.

Émile laughed. "Look, La Feesh! Your lover comes to rescue you."

The current swirled Dave on toward the rock, past it, twenty feet away. Ruth raised her head, straining at the bonds. Frantic in his helplessness, the hand logger could only stare into the white face as the tide carried him on. He stood, the stubs of oars in his hands.

"Good-by!" Émile mocked, and the boat was swept out of sight around the high, rocky point of the bay.

Numbness held the hand logger as he was borne along the shore. It was unthinkable, and so real. And Ruth had once flung herself so joyously into the same sea at Chance Cove.

Dave looked back. The point rose straight from the water for more than a hundred feet. On its flat top a few cedars grew, familiar sentinels above his home. He had intended to cut them some day. Now as he looked at them a cry burst from his throat. He took one of the stubs and began frantically to paddle his heavy craft to the beach.

A half hour later he crept out onto the flat top of the cliff and peeked down. Ruth was still bound to the ring bolt. Émile was walking back and forth beside her, carrying the rifle. He stopped once, pointed to the water slowly creeping up the side of the rock.

"Is it not a great act?" he shouted to the silent group on the float. "Only an hour more but—young love, peril, suspense! The soul of drama! Émile was not born in the wings for nothing."

DAVE gave no heed. He was looking down at the rock, up to the top of the nearest cedar, estimating, calculating. For years he had been making these forest giants do his bidding,

laying them down in carefully calculated places, swinging them against the force of gravity.

But failure had meant only a "hang-up," extra hours of toil with jack and barking iron. Now, in the scheme he had evolved, failure meant death for Ruth, and there were two chances to fail. A bungling job, and he would crush her as she lay on the rock. A faltering ax stroke, and Émile would still be free with his rifle while the tide rose higher and higher.

The nearest cedar rose one hundred feet from the cliff, was two feet through at the base. It stood ten feet back from the brink, and he could cut it without Émile's being able to reach him with a bullet. That part was easy. But that cedar must become a broom in his hands. With it he must sweep Émile from the rock and smite him on the cable.

Even when every detail was fixed in his mind, Dave went over the plan again. Finally he looked at Ruth. The water was now only two feet from her face. He crept back and began chopping.

The first *chop!* of the ax snapped Émile's head up. A chip sailed out over the water, and immediately the rifle cracked. But the bullet struck the tree above Dave's head.

Great chips fell away. The kerf widened as if by magic. Other shots came from the rock, but the ax strokes did not falter until Dave had finished under-cutting. Then he risked a peep, got his direction, made one side a trifle deeper, and began chopping at the back of the tree.

The shooting ceased and Dave crept forward. The cable still offered Émile escape, but the man was standing on the rock, laughing.

"A tree is not a gun!" he shouted exultantly. "He cannot aim it. If it comes I can run. If it strikes the rock the tide will be cheated."

Dave returned to his task. At last the bite of the ax caused a faint shiver in the lofty top. He peered over the brink. Émile, laughing, was shaking his fist. Another stroke and there was a whisper among the branches, the first snap of rending wood. The gentle movement became a gigantic sweep, the whisper a roar. The cedar was falling straight for the rock.

"He's cheated the tide!" Émile screamed.

He stepped confidently onto the cable. Dave stepped back. The ax bit again. It seemed like a wild fling of the tool, and it was guided by a delicate sensing of stresses and angles and movement. It cut through straining fibers just so far and no farther, just enough to release the retarding strain on one side, permit the tree to swing.

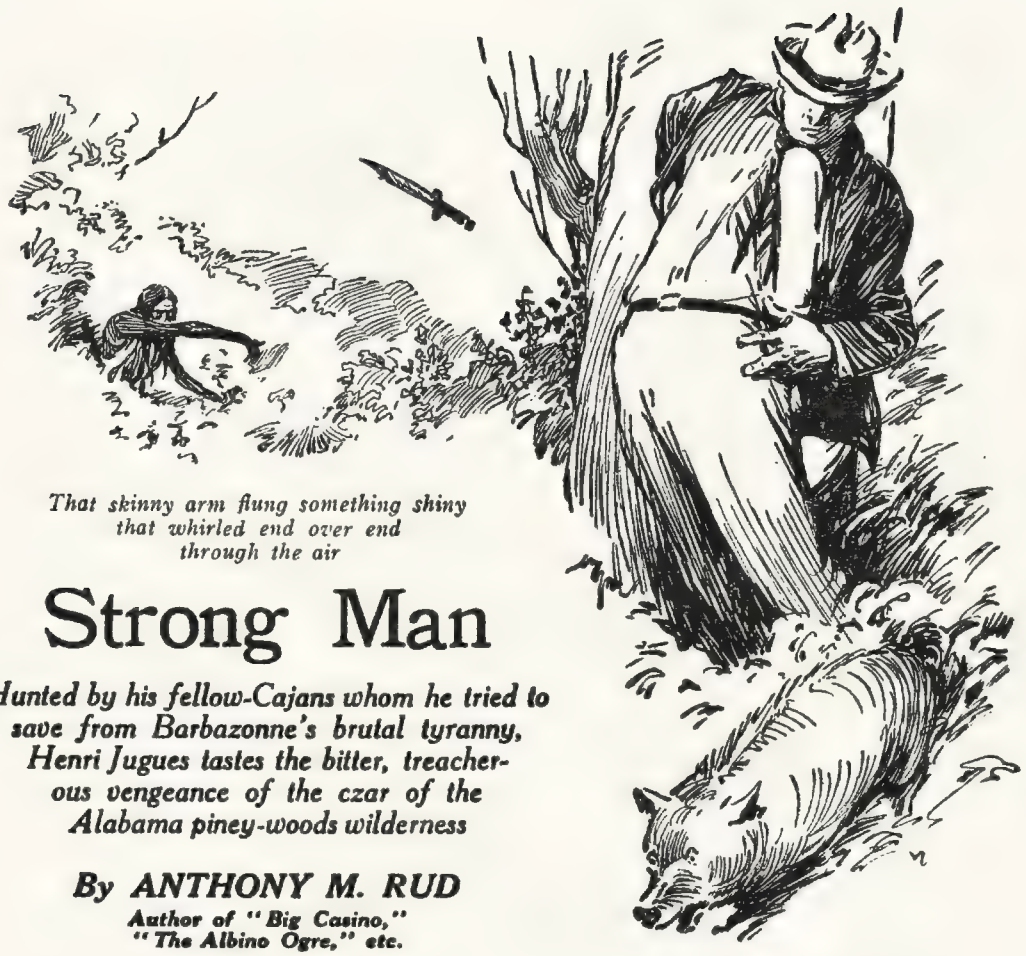
As Émile strutted out onto the cable that menacing top, now only one hundred and fifty feet above him and roaring like a hurricane, followed each step. He glanced up in amazement, ran a little farther, looked again. The top still followed.

He halted. The tree ceased its swing. And all the time it was rushing down with a crescendo roar. Terror gripped the feet that had slid so skillfully along the cable. He lost his balance, strove desperately to regain it, and was swallowed by the green avalanche.

"You have to hand it to Émile," Le Roy said that night. "Even when he was cruelest he had to be an actor."

"Yeah!" Gabby scoffed. "And a flop. The hand logger shifted the scene on him."

THE END.



That skinny arm flung something shiny that whirled end over end through the air

Strong Man

Hunted by his fellow-Cajans whom he tried to save from Barbazonne's brutal tyranny, Henri Jugues tastes the bitter, treacherous vengeance of the czar of the Alabama piney-woods wilderness

By ANTHONY M. RUD

Author of "Big Casino," "The Albino Ogre," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

HENRI JUGUES, a World War veteran, was a Cajan, raised in the Alabama "piney woods," but educated in the North. The Cajans are descendants of French Acadian exiles—the people of Longfellow's poem "Evangeline" — intermixed with Indian blood.

Henri loved Patricia Reilly, daughter of Mack Reilly, a Mobile politician, but before marrying her he was determined to solve the mystery of his own parentage.

Also, he had a great ambition to overthrow the dictatorship of Jules Barbazonne, the piney-woods boss, who was keeping the Cajans in isolation, poverty and ignorance. Henri wanted to bring enlightenment and financial independence to his people by teaching them to plant profitable crops and by building a road through the forest.

Barbazonne warned the war veteran to keep out of the big woods, and made several ineffectual attempts to have him killed, but Henri pushed into the forbidden territory and began spreading his propaganda.

This story began in the Argosy for May 31.

Additional proof of the strong man's ruthlessness came to Henri when he met Black Warrior, last of the Choctaws—an aged Indian chief whose legs had been shot away by Barbazonne years before.

Being told by the woods boss that Henri Jugues was a prohibition agent trailing moonshiners, Gustav and Pierre Druot sought his life. The war veteran recognized them in time, however, and won their friendship. Later, their sister Aline expressed an unrequited love for him.

Learning that Aline's father knew the secret of Henri's parentage, Barbazonne treacherously hit him on the head and mistakenly thought he had killed the old fellow. Then he decided upon slander to stop Henri's progress. He hired a Negro to kidnap Aline and coached a half-wit, Lonnie, to accuse Jugues of the abduction.

Another imbecile was bribed to murder Reilly. Henri found Patricia's father dead in a wrecked car in the forest and the girl herself wounded, whereupon he killed the assassin. Carrying Patricia in his arms, Henri was met by a posse of enraged Cajans seeking himself and Aline.

CHAPTER XIV.

A WARRIOR'S LOYALTY.

JULES BARBAZONNE, not quite certain whether or not his attempt to kill the elder Druot had become known, stayed in the maroon-starred anise covert. He waited while Gustav and his mother emerged from the deserted cabin and discussed the celluloid comb, that bit of evidence which, with the testimony of Lonnie, the half-wit, seemed to seal the fate of seventeen-year-old Aline Druot—and to hang the crime of her abduction squarely on the shoulders of Captain Henri Jugues.

When the mother and vengeful son, trailed by the gibbering Lonnie, turned back on the woods path to carry the tragic news, Jules started to follow. But Lonnie, pudgy and short of wind, could not keep up with the pair he had guided. He fell further and further behind.

Impatient, Jules considered knocking him on the head, but dismissed the thought. The Druots were certain to call for Lonnie's testimony again, provided they managed to capture Henri alive. And since Jugues had no reason in the world to expect pursuit, that capture should present small difficulty.

Trailing the half-wit, while the others sped on far ahead, did not suit Barbazonne's present purposes, however. He turned into the brush, and knowing that the other would pay no attention, made what speed he could, parallel to the winding woods path.

His memory of a certain wide curve, where the path avoided a boggy branch, served him well; he made the short cut at full speed. And then, as he approached the trail again he slowed, proceeding with caution. He heard voices. Up there a short distance ahead men were growling out condemnations, a quavery, cracked voice was protesting, a woman was wailing.

The mighty Barbazonne smiled. His double plan was working to perfection. Now after Catfish Joe had waylaid Mack Reilly, and the Cajans had taken their terrible vengeance upon Henri Jugues, there would be no one in the woods—or even in Mobile—to dispute his power.

No one?

As he stood listening, a gaunt razorback hog which had been snuffling at

acorns, suddenly snorted and plunged past him. Startled, Barbazonne fell back, dodging to the side of a huge live oak and reaching for his weapon. Sometimes these half starved, half mad animals which bore his brand were known to attack men without warning.

But the hog went on, probably not even seeing him. Something had frightened the beast—something wrinkled and brown which half arose back there in the scrub, snags of teeth bared in a ferocious gloating and hope of vengeance.

Just as the hog snorted, a skinny arm drew back. It snapped forward. Something shiny slithered end over end through the air.

Snick! At the height of a man's neck, exactly where Barbazonne had stood, a knife hung quivering in the trunk of the live oak!

Jerking forth his pistol, giving one look at the knife with eyes that fairly boggled from their sockets, the strong man leaped. He had glimpsed no enemy, but he had little stomach for an encounter in the brush. He put the thick bole of the tree between himself and the direction whence the knife had flown. Then he ran, his heavy body crashing through and between saplings irrespective of noise. In five minutes he was more than a quarter mile away.

The Devereauxes and Druots, engrossed in plans of rescue and of their own vengeance, paid no attention. If they had thought at all, the comment would have been, "just another hog."

FOR a long moment the brown, wrinkled face there in the brush remained immobile. Then lust for revenge faded from the black eyes, as the sparkle dies from polished jet held over a spout of steam. Slowly Black Warrior grasshoppered forward on hands and knees. He did not attempt pursuit of the plunging Barbazonne. That kill would have to await another occasion—a time when there would be no frightened hog to distract the Choctaw's deadly aim.

He retrieved the knife, his only weapon, then sat on his haunches, withered stumps of shins drawn under. He listened to the voices, to the wailing of the woman. He crept in closer. After the manner of Cajans these folk were repeating the story of Aline's abduction time after time, enlarging upon it. Black Warrior had no difficulty in understanding their belief.

But he did not join them. Instead, his actions were most peculiar. He crawled back to the base of the live oak before which Barbazonne had stood. There he bent and scrutinized the many imprints of the boots—Barbazonne, being vain of his small feet, habitually wore expensive bench-made boots, even in the woods. The semi-military heels produced plain imprints in the soft earth.

No expression came to the wrinkled countenance of the Indian; yet it appeared that an understanding of at least part of the situation had come to him. He crow-hopped back into the scrub, where Barbazonne's tracks led. The fact that the Cajan had avoided a much easier path only a short distance away, seemed to interest Black Warrior. Going slowly but surely, he followed the spoor, backtracking to the point where Barbazonne had deserted the path.

Here were the footprints of three who wore no shoes—two youths and a woman—beside the boot marks. The tracks of Barbazonne overlaid those of all three of the others in one spot or another. He had been following. Then

he had circled; later had stopped, apparently to eavesdrop. Why?

Black Warrior grunted. He grasshoppered up the path, where no especial trouble in following presented itself, making good time—for him.

At length he reached the spot where Barbazonne's marks led to the path. Here tracking was more difficult, for cattle had roamed this stretch of woods of late. But those black beads of eyes were trained to follow faint quail-runs, to spy out the bowl-shaped depressions in the grass where coveys nested during the night. He succeeded in finding the anise covert where again Barbazonne had stood and spied upon some one.

From that point the next step was simple. The tumbledown shanty was all that could be seen from this coign of vantage. The Indian went to it immediately, and discovered plain sign that two of the three barefooted ones had been inside; had come out, held some kind of a confab, and then started away at a run.

Black Warrior entered. Westering sunlight came in through a wide aperture in the disintegrating wall and roof, so his keen eyes saw much. They saw more by far than had been apparent to the untrained searching of the woman and boy. Here were the faint traces of circling ropes on the hard-packed earth. Here small fingers had dug vainly into it. Here also were prints of huge bare feet—feet the great toes of which angled outward. Flat feet. Feet of a woods Negro!

FROM the cabin, northeastward into a region of swamps and stagnant bayous, went the Indian. Here was a stretch of dripping woods, of bleaching cypress trunks and squat holly soon to bear untouched treasures of red berries. A land of 'gator and deadly moccasin. A land almost uninhabited, rarely visited save by fishermen who snagged out forty-pound catfish from the sluggish streams.

Black Warrior's task now became more difficult, especially because daylight was waning. The barefooted Negro whom he pursued left far less sign than had Barbazonne with his sharp-heeled boots. Here and there an oozing track bespoke the weight the black man had been carrying, however; and as surely as a hound upon the blood trail the Indian progressed.

Once or twice Black Warrior was at a loss, and ran around in widening circles on his hands and knees, paying no attention to the mud and water which layered upon his body. Once a belligerent cottonmouth moccasin came swimming toward him, thrust up its ugly head from the water; but a swift, sure blow with the knife sent the severed head spinning, and left the rest of the body to thrash and sink.

Each time, despite the gathering darkness, Black Warrior found the lost trail. He splashed onward.

And then, moments later, suddenly he froze, like some gaunt, tailless pointer. To his ears came a low moan—a sound which ebbed in a sobbing shudder, as if some one, half smothering, tried to call yet could not summon the requisite breath.

Quickly wheeling, the Indian made for the sound. Then he saw! A hideous grimace of understanding contorted his features. The trail had ended. Before him the twelve-foot-high bole of a gigantic magnolia, which once evidently had been struck by lightning. Quick swamp rot had eaten away all of the heart wood, and a jagged fissure from six inches to a foot in width had been cut from top to bottom

of the bark, probably by the destroying bolt.

This was not what caused the Indian's grimace, though. *From the opening at the ground projected the pointed tails of two alligators!* Attracted by the presence of living meat they had come up out of their slough.

Had they managed to reach their prey—that unfortunate human being imprisoned in the hollow tree?

BLACK WARRIOR wasted no time. He grabbed hold of the slimy tail of one saurian, and tugged with all his strength. Fortunately the reptile was of no great size—perhaps four feet long—so, despite the clawing and opposition of its strong, short legs, it was yanked forth, jaws gaping, striving to twist itself into position to slash this enemy with its rows of needle teeth.

But the Indian's strength and determination sufficed. The 'gator was dragged to the water and dropped in with a splash. Then the second.

Black Warrior groped inside the aperture. His hand encountered a warm body, crumpled in a widening of the hollow, perhaps two feet from the ground. That half-smothered moan of pain and terror sounded again.

Unequal to the task of lifting the girl from the place in which she had been wedged, he used his knife upon her bonds, meanwhile speaking to her quietly, reassuringly.

Though cramped and stiffened, Aline managed to wriggle out almost immediately—only to stumble forward and fall. Her numbed hands struggled with the gag; but Black Warrior undid it for her, and made certain that the alligators had not been able to do her harm—though they had frightened the girl half out of her wits.

"Oh, where is he? The terrible black man?" she cried, when the first reactions of relief had passed in a torrent of weeping.

As far as he was able in the last twilight, her rescuer had been examining tracks about the stump—and in doing so had found not only the heel-marks made by Jules Barbazonne, but one thing even more significant—a broad splotch of blood!

"Did my daughter hear shots fired?" asked Black Warrior.

"One. There was one shot—and a terrible screech."

The Indian looked grimly off toward a muddy morass not far distant. The boot tracks led that way, and they had been impressed deeply in the soft earth. "Who toils for Barbazonne takes his wage in scarlet wampum," he replied enigmatically.

Aline understood only the name.

"Jules Barbazonne? You mean he, too, was here?" She looked perplexed.

"He was here. He killed the black man who had worked for him in bringing you here."

Then, because he could imagine only too well the scene which even now might have been enacted back there in the drier woods, the Indian told what he knew and could guess concerning this diabolical scheme—and the peril which had come to a Cajan youth whom he called friend.

As he talked, the girl's cheeks grew paler and paler. Short, gasped words came from her lips. At last she sprang to her feet.

"I must go to him! I love him! I must save him!" she cried, gestured once as if in futile desperation, and then sped away, splashing into the water with no care to her future appearance or to lurking danger.

"It is well. The miles are long, and

I cannot travel fast," grunted Black Warrior, and grasshoppered slowly through the muck in the direction she had disappeared. He, too, meant to be present—if he could arrive in time.

CHAPTER XV.

WOODS INQUISITION.

THE fat pine fire leaped high, turning early semi-dark into the inky black of breezeless night. The warmth of sunlight faded, was replaced by the bone-chilling dampness of early October.

It was not really cold, yet Henri, left trussed upon the ground until a sufficient number of Cajans could be summoned for a woods court, found his teeth chattering and shivers skittering across his shoulders. He had been hot and tired from the unrested exertion of carrying one-hundred-and-twenty-pound Pat Reilly a distance of nearly two miles. She had been sleeping, limp and trusting in his arms.

Even the magnificent strength of those arms had not been enough to prevent the throbbing ache of fatigue. Now even anger could not replace the wasted cells and energy of his body; only relaxation and food could do that.

By the leaping flames of a fat pine fire newly lighted he saw nothing but enmity in the circle of his captors.

There would be no relaxation—not for him! Only from gruff, menacing demands which seemed to concern themselves with the present whereabouts of a Cajan girl—little Aline Druot—could he gather as much as a hint concerning the reason for his captivity.

Of course he knew nothing of Aline; as a matter of fact, he had not as much as glimpsed her for days. Yes, the last time he had seen her was when he had been demonstrating lime fertilizer over at the Jakes's corn patch.

Even that time he had consciously avoided Aline—and she knew it. With the directness of a consuming first love that feels no shame, she had come to him a week or so before, put her hands on his shoulders, and haltingly but directly asked him to be her man. She had not minced matters, either. She loved him and wanted him.

Was not it all simple? What mattered the ceremonies, if any? Not oftener than once in four or five months did an ordained minister of the Gospel ride through those woods; many marriages were solemnized with no more than a dance and the understanding of the fathers of both houses. Or even less formality. Yet such marriages are observed with even greater strictness than are those in more highly civilized communities.

Of course Henri had told Aline gently, as on that first occasion she had asked his kiss, that she was not the one he loved; that he could not marry her. But he had not wished to hurt her, and therefore had not said what he would have told a sophisticated girl of the cities—that he was engaged to another maiden.

As a result, immature but honestly-loving Aline Druot had refused to compromise or accept defeat. She merely became shyer. She shadowed Henri, haunting him, hanging upon his every word, his very jaunts through the scrub and forest when he thought himself unobserved . . .

First love, particularly in the hills and forests where all Nature is direct, cannot be voided by mere words. Aline, even after two gentle repulses, still considered Henri her man. She would have none but him. She would

claw and *kill* any one or anything that stood between!

BUT the tall, steel-muscled Henri Jugues lying there before the fire thought nothing at all of Aline as a feminine entity. He was bound, accused of something not quite clear as yet in his mind, where the fiends of fatigue were contending momentarily with the devils of pain; yet he knew himself innocent of any wrong thought or wrong deed directed against these folk—his own folk. So he waited for the decision of the woods court.

It was not for long. Gustav could not hold himself quiet. He came over half a dozen times, demanding the whereabouts of his sister, voicing husky threats of horrible things.

"I will thumb out those lying eyes of yours," he snarled brutally.

Henri looked up at him, but did not answer. Denials would have meant less than nothing. The entire affair, which he partially understood now, was just too ghastly. Once before he had seen a Cajan court in session, and he realized that a chance for exoneration would be given him. But what chance in the world had he?

They had taken Patricia away—where, he did not know. A little while ago she had run to him, red hair streaming, clothes bloodstained and disheveled. She had thrown herself upon the ground beside him, hysterically trying to loosen bonds that had been tied by experts. She had kissed him, had tried to find out what this all meant.

Two somber, unmoved Cajans had lifted her by the elbows and taken her away. These men had no sympathy whatsoever for a girl from Mobile; she would suffer no indignity, but her voice could not possibly give weight to any defense of a woods prisoner. The Cajans themselves would judge—and deal out their own brand of justice.

Père Druot, accompanied by Coddy Jakes and Al Devereaux, came over to Henri. The glowering Devereaux, who showed plainly that he looked forward with gusto to more entertainment than would be embodied in a simple execution for cause, carried in his hands a gallon jug of cane syrup and a paint brush.

Old Druot was t r e m b l i n g. He stretched out both hands. "What have you done with my daughter?" he quavered. "Where is she, my little Aline?"

"I have not seen her, *mon père*. I do not know," answered Henri steadily. "I am betrothed to this other girl, daughter of Mack Reilly of Mobile. Her father was bushwhacked in his car, and killed about two miles back up the road. When you came upon me I was carrying Miss Reilly to my own car, which is just a little way farther. I would have taken her home to Mobile, and notified the sheriff concerning her father's death—and also of a man I have killed."

"Who was that one you have killed? We had not heard of that."

Henri told them of the unprovoked attack, and stated that he believed Catfish Joe to have been the murderer of Mack Reilly. At any rate he, Henri, had been forced to defend himself so many times of late that he had shot to kill when Catfish Joe let go at him with a shotgun.

The statement was greeted with derision. "Haw!" Devereaux sneered. "Joe was one of the best shots in the woods. If he had fired at you, that would have been your finish. Much more likely you are the one who killed

this Reilly, so you could steal his daughter as well!"

AN ominous mutter broke forth from the Cajans, now some forty in number, who had crowded in a ring about the recumbent prisoner. This sounded like logic to their narrow minds.

Some one suggested that Catfish Joe might have attempted to halt the first kidnaping, that of Aline Druot, and had paid for his courage with his life. The fact that he had been a woods derelict of no standing mattered not at all now. His brother Lonnie, the half-wit, had been the one to bring the tale of the original crime. Perhaps he could tell even more, if closely questioned from this standpoint.

While Al Devereaux waited impatiently, anxious to be at the sinister business he had suggested as a means for loosening the tongue of the prisoner, others shook their heads. The chief business before them all was the finding of Aline Druot; and if the evidence itself could persuade Henri to confess, his punishment could well wait until all the facts were in hand.

Perhaps he had killed her—and if so, this punishment would be relentless and terrible. Yet, instead of working itself into a foaming rage, the lynching madness of mobs, this gathering seemed to grow quieter. The menace in that quietness was no less; yet this meeting was the only court to which a Cajan could take a grievance, and as such it was held away from unconsidered violence by the elders.

Patricia Reilly, horrified to the depths of her soul by the happenings of the day, ran up before these older men. Her red hair streamed back over her shoulders, glistening like burnished copper in the yellow light of the flames.

"I understand now the awful things you are saying!" she cried, speaking to them in awkward, schoolgirlish French—which probably was harder for most of the assembled men to follow than their tongue was to her. "But you are wrong, *wrong!* This man, Captain Henri Jugues, is honorable. He is of your people, and he has fought many months against the hordes that swept through France, the motherland of your ancestors!

"He is a man of honor. I know him and I love him! He has promised himself to me, and I know he has kept his promise. My father and he were true friends. Does any Cajan murder his friend? No! Does any Cajan, promised to a woman he loves and who loves him, come into your woods to steal the daughter of a man who is his friend? *Never!*"

Back in the outer circle of the court a shaky old man lifted the head which had been bowed against his breast, and started to speak. But a firm, almost cruel grip fastened itself upon his arm, restraining him, diverting his attention.

From the shadows Jules Barbazonne had stolen up to the gathering; and while he had no intention of appearing as a prime mover in this judgment conclave, yet he had even less reason to allow Père Druot to throw a monkey wrench into the proceedings, which seemed to be going so well for the woods king.

"Be still, if you would find your daughter!" he commanded in a low tone. "Has this one not been pointed out as the kidnaper?"

Still half dazed by his recent inexplicable injury and by the misery in his heart, old André Druot fell silent. In spite of all that had been revealed, he found it hard to believe Henri

Jugues had done this thing; yet he thought to himself it was hard for men who grew old. Sometimes they did not think or see things as clearly as in youth. Probably these others were right, and Henri a thoroughgoing scoundrel.

PATRICIA went on, desperately calling on half-forgotten fragments of vocabulary, limning for her audience as well as she was able the purposes which had brought Henri to the woods—the firm desire to be of real service to these very people whom he knew and loved; the hope of solving the mystery of his own parentage.

Haltingly she begged them to visit the scene of her father's death—to read the story which must be told there of the ambush. She saw that her words had made little if any impression; so, her face paling more and more until against the red flame of hair it seemed cast from plaster of Paris, she switched from pleading to a portrayal of that happening at dinner table in Mobile, when a mulatto, probably employed by one of her father's enemies, almost had slain Henri as well as herself and father with a hurled hand grenade.

The Cajans, for most part—barring only the four Devereauxes and the mighty Barbazonne—had listened in grim but respectful silence. But now a clamor arose. Lonnie, the half-wit, sucking on a two-foot length of sugar cane and giggling at what his vacant mind now conceived to be a funny sort of game, was dragged into the circle. He smirked and drooled the cane juice from the corners of his mouth.

All interest in Patricia's harangue vanished. Again she was led a little apart, though allowed to witness the next act in this travesty of justice.

Lonnie was shoved forward. The bound figure of Henri Jugues was pointed out to him, and he was asked over and over if this was the man who had stolen Aline Druot.

At first the half-wit stared blankly. He had forgotten everything he had said—even forgotten the fact that he had guided Mère Druot and Gustav to the ramshackle cabin. But little by little the patient, ominous repetition of the questions either awakened a faint memory of Barbazonne's drilling, or else by itself made an impression on his putty brain. He grinned foolishly and pointed down. He spoke jerkily.

"That is—bad man—very bad—nice girl, Aline—she give—"

"Is he the one who stole her? Did you see him and a black man steal her?" came the sudden, stern question.

"Yes, he steal. Bad man. He—"

And that was sufficient. A muttering r u m b l e from the assembled Cajans told that a verdict had been rendered. Coddy Jakes, a big rawboned Cajan with streaks of white in his sweeping mustaches, came closer to the prisoner, pushing aside two of the Devereauxes.

"You have heard!" he said in slow, terrible anger. "You, Henri Jugues! For the last time, will you tell us—and the father of this girl you have stolen and betrayed because she was fool enough to love you—what you have done with her?"

The jaw muscles of the captive tightened. Small bunches like hazel nuts stood out under the skin.

"You are all wrong!" he said between set teeth. "Kill me, if you are fools enough to do it—but you will never find Aline that way. I know nothing—"

"Enough. There are ways to part the most stubborn lips—and we know

the ways!" came the grim rejoinder. "Al Devereaux, you and your brothers—"

The first named grinned. This was what the four had come to see. They roughly lifted the bound prisoner, and then, like pallbearers, carried him out of the circle of firelight, back about eight yards, where a low mound rose amid the palmetto fans.

Henri understood, yet not a sign showed that he had guessed this torture. His voice was clear, bell-like in resonance as he spoke the farewell to the girl he loved.

"Don't stay here, Pat, dearest," he called. "I love you—and you know I did not do this nasty thing. Remember me as telling you that from my heart. And this is—good-by!"

As he was borne away, the Cajans trooping along as a silent but merciless bodyguard, a red-head fought tooth and nail to join him—to die with him if death was to be the portion of this injustice. But two Cajans easily overcame her. She fainted.

And she did not even know that a chunky, well-dressed man came out of the shadows, dismissed the pair of guards with a peremptory nod, and then sat down beside Patricia to look upon her with lustful desire.

Jules Barbazonne, in the late middle years of life, had fixed his tremendous will-power upon the acquisition of Patricia Reilly!

CHAPTER XVI.

TINY RED DEVILS.

IN all the Gulf Coast region, from Ten Thousand Islands to the Chandler group—and far up inland every way—there exists a pest which the United States Government has tried—largely in vain—to exterminate. Red ants.

These creatures are no more than one-eighth of an inch in size, individually. The way they come—in double or quadruple columns of millions—they are dozens of yards long. Or even—as has been said officially—a half mile long. And they are flesh eaters—insect carnivora.

The Cajans came. They watched the four Devereaux men cut green stakes, drive them into the earth, and with ropes spread-eagle the prisoner. Henri was placed on the ground, face up, about fifteen feet from a low mound, an ant hill.

Then Al Devereaux, using his jug of cane syrup and paint brush, daubed circles of sweet, sticky stuff about Henri's eyes, mouth, and splashed on lines leading to his ears. Then he coated the outstretched arms and legs—tore away the flannel shirt and cotton undershirt and painted the body.

Now, daubing out a line from the prostrate body, Devereaux splashed a thick trail of the strong syrup leading directly to the ant hill.

Grinning an appreciation of his part in the terrible ceremony, Stew Devereaux took his single-barrelled shotgun and shoved its butt deeply into the soft but intimately-celled home of the red ants.

These creatures are not nocturnal marauders, yet they resent and will fight fiercely to the death against the slightest disturbance of their domestic arrangements. A thousand of their shock troops leaped from somewhere to bite indignantly at the unyielding walnut stock of the weapon.

Al prodded the hill again and again. The tiny insects swarmed up toward his hand on the barrel. He coolly wiped them away with a bandanna.

Some of the ants fell into the syrup. Soldiers by training and instinct, they had the same natural appetites which actuated doughboys fresh from the trenches. In scarlet, boiling millions—looking like crimson foam erupting from the earth, in the light of the fat pine torches thrust into the sand—the ants came forth.

But chaos was short-lived. An electric signal, something too faint for human ears, was flashed through the moiling mob. Instantly all hectic action ceased. The tiny red devils paused where they were, hungrily waving mandibles.

The overpowering scent of formic acid, from the ants, mingled with the shoeblacking smell of crudely skimmed cane syrup. On the side of the hill a double column formed, marching in more perfect order than even the Imperial Guards of the Kaiser on goose-step parade. They came down to the syrup, casually murdered and ate such of their comrades as had become useless because of entanglement in the sticky stuff.

INCH by inch—faster than any human organization could have completed a work on a comparative scale—they reached and invaded the sweet treasure, each ant carrying back an infinitesimal drop, swinging out into quadruple column — the newcomers arriving on the inside, the treasure-bearers going back to the despoiled home on the outside. And the fifteen feet of leeway, deliberately presented to Henri for the purpose of postponing the final shrieking moments of his torture, were eaten away with astounding swiftness, inch by inch.

Cannibals, completely heartless creatures, insects depending on a fare of red meat to sustain their warrior instincts, the devil ants were coming. A little while, a few moments, and they would desert even the lure of sugar—and would go voraciously for the helpless flesh which lay there before them!

Many faces in the group of Cajans had paled. One youth, indeed, had gone away by himself in the woods, unable to stomach this sort of proceeding—no matter what had been the crime committed by Henri Jugues.

But most of the assembled sixty-odd —the number had grown steadily—waited with stern faces. It was not often that a woods court convened, for nearly every dispute was settled between the men or families involved; and the sheriff never heard—or cared to hear. No votes, no money, and clannish hatred of outsiders. Why should he concern himself, even if a thousand Cajans were to shoot each other? Just so much less trouble in the woods, for the future.

There were no women, except Pat Reilly. She was held back on the scene of the original court. And now Jules Barbazonne had her unresisting, unconscious form in his arms.

Hesitantly—for even in Barbazonne the chivalric tradition of his people was not entirely stamped out—the strong man of the pine forest brushed away the wealth of tousled red-gold hair from the face of the unconscious Patricia Reilly.

Then, flaming to a turkey red over his cheekbones, this rich man whom woods girls regarded as a sort of devil-god, planted a kiss upon the young woman's lips. He drew away, breathing strangely as he contemplated her beauty.

Unbeknown to Barbazonne, two Cajans had come up and were looking askance at his one-sided love-making. Lonnie, still chewing on his sugar cane,

snickered and drooled. Coddy Jakes, stern and decent, reached over and with steel fingers clasped the shoulder of the man whom ordinarily he acknowledged as master.

"Such is not the way we treat women in these woods!" he said.

With a curse Barbazonne started up; he looked dazed for a moment. Then a flush of anger came to his cheeks.

"How is it your damn' business?" he retorted. "This lady is no kin of yours, is she?"

Coddy Jakes shrugged significantly and withdrew. Lonnie followed. Naturally Jakes was not much concerned over the fate of a girl from Mobile, although Patricia's gallant plea for the life of her man somehow had got under his skin. It was too bad, but Henri Jugues was undeniably guilty . . .

Yet even left alone again with Pat Reilly, while the farcical judgment of the woods court was carried toward completion, Jules did not again touch the recumbent girl. Other thoughts occupied his attention. He had too much to win now—and too much to lose by public folly. He would not need to wait long, to get this girl.

HENRI JUGUES lay helpless. He knew exactly what he faced. Turning his head, the light of the pine torches allowed him to see the ants. The creatures were halfway across the fifteen foot space. They would reach him in the course of another twenty minutes or so.

Like divisions of soldiers consolidating captured territory, they moved up and up—slowly yet remorselessly, occupying and assimilating all that they had attained. But being soldiers, they craved red meat even more than sugar.

In a little while they would reach his body . . .

Coddy Jakes came back. Coddy was forty-five or fifty years of age—even he did not know exactly—but he was a sort of rough leader among the woodsmen of the farther reaches, much more respected than any of the four Devereauxes. Completely uneducated, he still possessed a native intelligence which had allowed him to attain a certain ascendancy he never had sought—and never had valued. The force of his biting contempt, directed at families like the Devereauxes, had put him almost unwillingly in the position of spokesman.

"Hadn't we better stop this here thing now and put him to death some other way?" Jakes asked hoarsely.

It was plain he did not like the methods of the woods inquisition, yet would abide by the verdict of the majority.

"Coddy Jakes," said Henri, his voice clear and calm, "I know you—and you ought to be able to judge me. As God, beside you, is my judge, I know nothing whatever concerning Aline Druot! If I am eaten by those ants, and burn in hell for my other sins, I shall wait for you with a red-hot pitchfork! I am innocent of this!"

"He is! He is innocent!"

The half-hysterical cry came from the lips of Pat Reilly. Regaining consciousness, she had broken away from Barbazonne, but now several of the men again took her, kicking, screaming, fighting tooth and nail, back into the shadows.

"Go back, Pat dear!" Henri called. "Please go away! I love you—and if you love me, you'll go away! These idiots can't understand anything!"

Her voice came back, a despairing sob. "I'll never leave you! If they kill you—I'll kill myself. Will you meet me—beyond?"

The first file of the red ants crawled up to his face. Henri spat them away, "Please go, dearest—far! I'll see you —somewhere—*God!*"

The first dozen of the red ants had bitten into his flesh!

The ensuing seconds of that red horror were too awful to recount. After that initial exclamation Henri kept his lips tight sealed with pain and determination. He prayed, too — prayed that somehow Pat Reilly would go or be taken from this scene of torture before his will and his manhood broke down.

Well he knew that even the bravest man in the world can stand only so much—just until his strength and nerve are sapped by blood-letting and pain, to a certain point. Then the toughest will yell and shriek—will become something far less than the man he has been, a pitable thing with no will, only pain centers that scream aloud to the remnant of his brain . . .

"Where did you take Aline Druot?"

"What did you do with the little girl?"

HENRI shook his head. The ants had come up in a band over his right arm, and were feasting there. The pain was too great. He could not trust himself to speak again —though the certainty was hovering above his mind—the thought that his hard flesh, inured even as it was to shock or combat, could not withstand this milling torture. Sooner or later he must break loose with a lying confession—confession of a crime of which he was innocent!

Of course that could not help him along; yet it might bring him a trifling few moments of surcease from these driving, burning, biting ant-horrors! They were underneath his clothes now, spreading, tearing—as inexorably as a shrapnel-burst—into the muscle and flesh.

Yet he set his teeth. His lips compressed into a harsh, bloodless line. Seconds passed—interminable seconds.

"What did you do with the girl?" Harsh, merciless, the question came again.

Now, however, a cry of anguish broke from one in the ranks of the watchers. White-haired Père Druot sprang forward, a keen skinning knife clutched in his bony fist. Pushing through those who half-heartedly attempted to restrain him, he dropped to one knee beside the prisoner. He shakily thrust the point of steel to Henri's throat.

"Tell me where my girl is, and I shall give you the mercy of this knife!" he cried. "*Nigaud!* If the ants devour you, what will you have gained?"

Henri gathered all his strength against the consuming pain. He looked up straight into the old man's eyes. "As God is my judge, Père André Druot," he answered clearly, "I know nothing of your daughter. I have not seen her or harmed her. I—"

But a sudden rush of clearness and conviction had come to the father. "It is true! I believe him!" he cried, throwing the knife point down into the sand.

With an upward leap almost of frenzy, Druot jumped with both feet upon the line of ants, grinding under his heel those which were coming, batting with his felt hat those on Henri's chest and brushing others off his face.

Retrieving the knife, he ripped through Henri's bonds. The captive staggered to his feet in agony, scratching and slapping the red fiends whom only death could dissuade from this unexpected feast. The old man helped, brushing frantically.

Thereupon Al Devereaux pushed forward roughly, his brows drawn in a scowl. He felt cheated of what had promised to be excellent entertainment; and while he and his brothers knew little and cared less concerning Aline Druot, they did possess a vague low-caste hatred for this educated Cajan, this one who would disturb all the old customs of the woods, who until this day had been held up by many as a sort of tin god.

Two of the brothers seized Henri, while the others drew the old man away, twisting his wrist so that he dropped the knife.

Henri fought desperately; but his arms were numb from constriction of the bonds, and much blood had oozed from the welts across his chest. He was overcome, thrown again to the ground, and the two Devereauxes sat on him.

"You cannot stop us now, old man," Al Devereaux panted gruffly, then raised his heavy voice to quell a confused and uncertain murmur from the other Cajans. "This illegitimate, this *bâtard* has been judged and must take his punishment—"

BUT then, strangely and unasked, Henri heard one of the facts which had brought him into the woods—the hitherto unexplained mystery of his birth!

Père Druot, beside himself with anguish of heart and conflicting emotions, screamed back a denial of the epithet which was about all to register on his half crazed mind.

"He is no illegitimate foundling! Who says that, lies! Do I not know? I, André Druot? Was not his mother, Lucille Druot, my first cousin? Was not his father the damn-Yank, Armand Jugues from the North? And were these two not married by the holy priest in our chapel? I will not stand—"

"Go to the devil!" growled Al Devereaux. "Who cares for that old story? If he's the spawn of a damn-Yank, what of it? He has been convicted. Now we will tie him once more and let the ants have their way, as he seems too stubborn to confess."

And they were knotting the cut ropes, forcing Père Druot further away so he could not interfere again, when into the circle of torchlight sped a begrimed, tattered shadow, a girl whose black hair fluttered wildly.

Aline Druot!

With a throaty cry she pushed inward, elbowing the woods folk who gave way with wondering exclamations. When she saw Henri held by the two men, she leaped upon them, clawing at the Devereauxes, actually throwing them aside to clasp the captive in a convulsive embrace.

Conscious of his half nakedness, Henri pushed her gently away. Then Père Druot ran up to take the girl in his arms.

"My poor Aline! My sweet one!" he muttered brokenly, the tears flowing down his seamed cheeks. "What have they done to you? What have they done?"

But Aline Druot had the spirit of the pantheress. As the Cajans crowded around, bombarding her with questions, she broke loose from her father's arms and ran to Henri's side again.

"You ask me if I had been kidnaped? If I had been tied and kept a captive?" she answered. "Yes! See the marks of rope upon my arms?" She thrust them upward into the torchlight.

"But I am unharmed otherwise," she hastened on, as a threatening growl came from the Cajans.

"Did this one do it? This Henri Jugues?" demanded Coddy Jakes, confronting her, his shotgun lined upon Henri—who just at that moment was putting on his torn shirt.

Aline Druot threw back her head and laughed—there was love, despair, and self-scorn in that laughter.

"Henri?" she derided. "Oh, you fools! Have I not told you, many of you, that I love him? Do you think that if he cared for me at all, if he had wanted to carry me away, he should have had to *tie* these arms? No! They should have been about his neck, refusing forever to loosen their embrace! They—"

But the girl could stand no more. Of a sudden she crumpled to a heap on the ground, sobbing out the bitter dregs of a love that was hopeless.

CHAPTER XVII.

BARBAZONNE'S SECRET.

JULES BARBAZONNE had gambled too much; and now he realized the fact with sickening certainty. Yet the strength of body and will which had made him a dictator in the piney woods did not desert him even in what he foresaw might be complete defeat.

The strong man was game. He came into the circle of torchlight, one hand thrust under his coat lapel, holding the butt of a pistol.

"That man lies! This girl lies!" He gestured first at Henri, then at Aline Druot. "You all know me, men of Acadia! You know I have made it possible for you to live in comfort. Do you think I ever could lie to you—you, who know me? Never!"

"Not unless—the steers did not tally—the hogs were short on weight—" A confused murmur, a little defiant, answered.

"Not unless you opened your mouth, you liar!" That was Henri Jugues. Still numb in the arms, unsteady on his feet, he faced the woods baron—scornful even though he saw the hand beneath the coat lapel grip the butt of a gun.

Bleeding in several places, still tormented by some of the ants who had been hidden in his clothing, Henri was in no mood for any sort of compromise.

Then he leaped—realizing that the gun might come forth in time to kill him. But he had a trick to offset that draw. He flung himself headlong at the ankles of Barbazonne.

Down went both men in a heap. The Cajans, appalled, not completely understanding, waited silent and staring.

Over and over, striking, gouging—for this was a battle of hate, not of rules—went the two strong men. Jules succeeded in getting out his pistol. One shot went wild. Another took Al Devereaux in the calf of the leg, and that shinny-masher crumpled up, screaming maledictions.

The third shot would have taken Henri in the right temple—except that he just succeeded in knocking up the barrel with his right wrist. It struck a tuft of long-leaf pine from the top of a tree.

Up to their feet. Smashing. Holding. Henri's right fist was drumming like a steam piston on the older man's mid-section.

Of a sudden he shifted his grip on Barbazonne's pistol hand — Henri grabbed and wrenched with both hands!

Down—down—

Two shots sounded. The pistol had been turned inward. Both shots tore

through the heavy muscles of Barbazonne's abdomen. He crumpled, gasping.

"Damn you!" breathed Barbazonne, game to the last. He knew he was going, but the expression on his heavy countenance did not alter appreciably.

Henri was breathing heavily. He knew that both Pat Reilly and Aline Druot, as well as the appalled Cajans, had come up to his side.

"After all, Jules Barbazonne," he said quietly, "you can repay one debt —which may get you better consideration where you are going."

Jules clenched his hands in pain. Foam bubbled at his lips. "So, *nigaud*, fool," he muttered in a last faint attempt at scorn. "You win. I was wise to forbid you the woods— You—strong man, now. Fixed me, did you?"

A wave of pity for this broken tyrant swept over the conqueror. "Fixed yourself, rather," he corrected briefly, and after a moment added: "Listen, *m'sieu'*. I'm willing to forgive everything—and I mean just that—if you'll tell me now who has been depositing money to my account at the Copley Trust all these years. I want to know before I—marry."

"Marry?" Barbazonne's weakening voice seemed to wander. "Oh, yes, marry. I, too, once wished to marry —long ago. I would have—been your father—but Lucille married that damn-Yank!" Hatred strengthened his tones. "So I kill—kill them both in the storm —my Lucille whom I loved—the damn-Yank Jugues." He coughed blood. "My money—ten thousand a year—nothing to me. It gave me a sense of triumph over that cursed Jugues—his son dependent on my charity— Then you came here—threatened my rule in these woods—*my* woods. Damn you!"

At that instant a wizened old Indian chief grasshoppered into the circle of awestruck, marveling Cajans. The newcomer carried a knife between his toothless lips. His eyes glinted venomously.

Seeing him, Barbazonne rallied, reached for the gun, which had fallen to the ground near by. "*Nom de Dieu!* You — you red-skinned thief — hog-killer—you waited guard at chapel while damn-Yank marry my Lucille!"

The gun blazed just as Black Warrior leaped upon the prostrate Barbazonne, burying the knife in his heart.

Without a word, the last of the Choctaws—avenged in full—gasped a death rattle and his soul passed on to the Happy Hunting Grounds.

Two bodies lay side by side—Black Warrior and the king of the piney woods—surrounded by a group of somber Cajans that for twenty years and more had been virtually serfs of one of the two whose ghastly eyes no longer saw the flickering torchlight nor blackness of the brooding forest beyond.

BY the time dawn reddened the tips of tall pines to the east, the two men had been given fitting burial in the woods they both had known so well—in the middle of a queer trail that wound in and out of a palmetto grove.

Black Warrior left no relatives and no property except the hunting knife which had killed his enemy, an old tepee, and a few trinkets, which were laid reverently upon his grave.

But Barbazonne possessed a great deal of wealth. When his will was read, some time afterward, the Cajans learned that he had been more magnanimous in death than in life, for he bequeathed all his live stock to the

woods dwellers. And he left more than a million dollars in money and securities as a trust fund to be used by the Cajan elders as they saw fit—a last kingly gesture.

Henri's wounds were cleaned and bandaged with soothing herbs, and then he was able to walk. Patricia rushed to his arms, his lips against hers. The Cajans still were milling about the woods, but now they did not disturb. They awaited his pleasure, anxious to help, to repair in some measure the terrible mistake they had made.

Henri took Patricia to the Jakes cabin, where a motherly woman could be trusted to give her the rest and care she so greatly needed.

A Cajan who had learned to drive a car was sent in Henri's car to Mobile with two messages—one to the sheriff about Mack Reilly, the other concerning Pat's wardrobe, to the maid of the Reilly household.

Henri himself bathed and donned a fresh outfit, then rolled himself in a blanket and lay down among his stores in the deserted cabin. He slept unbrokenly for twenty-two hours.

Three days later they were ready to leave the woods—for sadness, and for the happiness which would lie beyond the last farewell to old Mack Reilly.

Henri went for Patricia, and found Coddy Jakes with an embarrassed group of Cajan men waiting for him. Patricia came out, pale but beautiful, in a simple black dress, with small black hat and slippers to match. The Cajans awkwardly pulled off their felts—a most unusual ceremony for the piney woods.

Coddy Jakes, a big, sincere man, met Henri directly and held out his hand. "I hope you will shake hands with me—for all of us," he said in a husky voice.

Henri returned the clasp, smiling a little in the depths of his eyes.

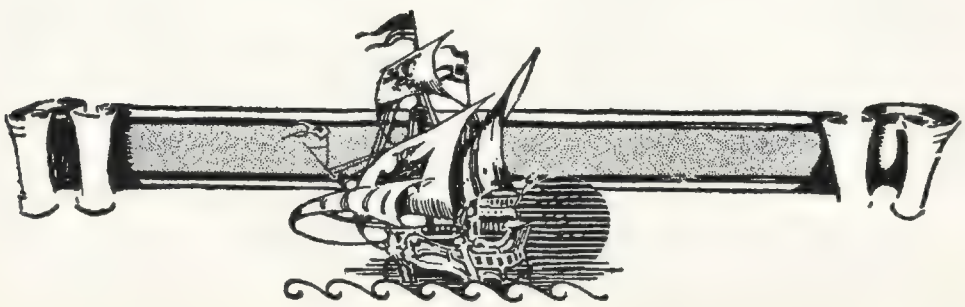
"We-all just wanted to tell you how sorry we are for what happened," the woodsman went on.

Henri shrugged slightly; such was the way of life, he supposed.

"All the Cajans are behind you, Captain Jugues, in what you have been doing for this section of the country. I am sorry that no more of us could be here to say *au revoir*—but forty of our men have been shoveling away the sand, so your car will not stall on the trip to Mobile! And the rest are hauling gravel for the new road you want built. By the time you come back—and for all the Cajans I *ask* you to come back—this road will be gravel all through Washington County!"

Henri smiled. "I'll be back," he said, from the heart—for these were his people; then he turned to look into the somber but deeply passionate eyes of the girl he loved.

THE END.



"You can pay me five dollars," the officer growled

A Dabble in Dogs

Bill and Jim, the drifters, hadn't ever quite gone to the dogs before; but they were always game for any scheme that looked like a meal-ticket

By JOHN H. THOMPSON

THE dog, darting out from the underbrush, was so anxious to sink its teeth into us that it failed to see the big red car approaching. There was a sickening thud, a yelp, and the dog rolled over into the ditch.

The car screeched to a stop while the dog, its original objective completely forgotten, regained its feet, tore yelping up the road and disappeared around a curve.

"Some luck!" chuckled Bill.

"I'll say it was bum luck." The driver of the car had opened the door and clambered out. "I'm sorry. I didn't see your dog until it was almost under the wheels. Maybe it wasn't hurt very much." He glanced hopefully in the direction whence the dog had disappeared.

"He's probably lying dead in the road around the curve," said Bill still more hopefully.

"Oh, I don't really think so." The stranger looked worried. "Suppose I were to offer you five dollars?" he suggested tentatively.

"We'd accept it," declared Bill promptly.

Without further ado, the stranger pulled out a roll of bills, peeled off a fiver and handed it over.

"That's satisfactory to me," he remarked as he clambered back into the car.

"Far be it from us to kick," declared Bill gratefully, pocketing the fiver.

And the car sped away.

"Well, what in thunder do you know about that!" I ejaculated. "But it don't hardly seem square to me to—"

"It wasn't our fault, was it, that a stray hound thought we were a couple of perambulating soup bones? It wasn't our fault that the car hit him. It wasn't our fault that the driver thought we owned—"

"Our hands are lily white," I conceded, to end the oration. "And I guess everybody's satisfied except the dog."

"He's probably lying dead up there ahead," said Bill cheerfully. "That dog was hurt. He could run only just so far. I'm sorry for the poor mutt, even if he did try to tear us to pieces. I'm sorry, too, because we might have annexed him and used him as a steady source of income. There'd be more money in that than in selling Indian Oil."

A DILAPIDATED touring car with flapping side curtains rounded the curve ahead and stopped abreast of us. The driver leaned out.

"That brown hound dog belong to you two?" he jerked his thumb in the direction of the curve from whence he had come.

Bill and I looked at each other. I knew the same picture was running through his mind—the picture of an injured dog flopping down in the road under the wheels of the dilapidated touring car. Two fivers would be better than one.

"Whose did you think it was?" countered Bill.

"I thought it was yours."

Bill nodded approvingly. "That dog is worth a lot to me and my pal," he declared truthfully. "If anything happened to him we'd—"

"That's all right then," interrupted the man in the car. "I just wanted to make sure. That dog is without collar or license tag. I'm the dog warden of Goshen. You can pay me five dollars and I'll give you the license now, or you can get into the car and I'll take you right up to Justice Wadhams for trial."

Bill gasped in dismay. "I guess it was somebody else's dog you saw. We—"

The stranger opened the door of the tonneau.

"Jump in," he invited. "We'll drive right up to Justice Wadhams's place. It suits me O. K. to have the case come to trial because then I'll get a court fee as well as my part of the license fee. Dogs should have been licensed before the first of the month."

"But we don't own no dog," groaned Bill.

"You just told me you did," snapped the dog warden. "You're like all the rest of the cheap skates who try to evade paying for a license. Justice Wadhams slapped a fine of fifteen with costs on the last one and I hope he does the same with you. Get in the car. We'll stop and pick up the dog. He's in Gisselbrecht's yard!"

"Fifteen with costs! And it'd be our luck to have Justice Wadhams turn out to be the man who ran into the dog," moaned Bill to me. He dug his hand into his pocket and pulled out the fiver. "We'll take the license," he declared.

The stranger produced a pad of blanks, filled out one of them, took the fiver, fished out the license, and prepared to depart.

"Don't forget this a year from now," he admonished.

"We won't forget it for ten years," promised Bill fervently as he accepted a brass license tag.

The dog warden pocketed the fiver, stepped on the starter and the dilapidated touring car rattled away.

"Easy come; easy go," sighed Bill. "But, holy mackerel, I never realized that owning a dog involved so much financial excitement—it's like owning a block of wildcat oil stock. Seeing's we've got the license we might as well take the hound. Who knows, we may be millionaires before nightfall."

I doubted that. But we rounded the curve in the road and came upon the dog tied to a tree in the yard in front of a farmhouse. Its injuries apparently had not been as serious as we had supposed, for the dog was devoting its wholehearted attention to efforts to free itself.

As we started to enter the yard it caught sight of us and with fangs bared it made a vicious lunge at us. Fortunately the rope held. We backed hurriedly out of the yard. I had lost all interest in dogs as a source of financial excitement. Not so Bill, however.

"There's money in dogs," he declared stubbornly. "We can't afford to let this golden opportunity slide. Let's see: we've got sixty cents between us."

I groaned. Sixty cents represented two bowls of soup and a few other similar necessities.

"WE'LL go ahead to the village and use the sixty cents to buy a muzzle," continued Bill. "Then we'll come back and get the dog. After that it'll just be a matter of making sure there're no holes in our pockets through which the coins might drop."

"But when will we eat?" I protested hungrily.

"Food! That's all you think about," said Bill reprovingly. "Here we're standing on the threshold of fortune and all that is bothering your feeble brain is the matter of food."

"It isn't my brain—it's my stomach," I sighed, but I knew it would be a waste of time to argue with Bill. I tightened my belt and trailed along after him.

I didn't have the heart to go into the hardware store with him to see our last sixty cents shoved across the counter for a dog muzzle. I preferred to stand outside and watch a blond damsel tossing wheat cakes on a griddle in the window of a restaurant next door.

She had tossed the third batch of cakes and I was in a partial state of hypnosis, holding the side of the building for support, before Bill blew out of the store.

In one hand he carried a muzzle. In the other a folded newspaper. He was beaming like a love-sick swain who has just been kissed unexpectedly by his sweetie.

"Look at that," he declared gleefully, tapping the folded newspaper with the muzzle.

I looked, but didn't see anything that could hold a candle to the sight I had just been witnessing. My mouth was still watering.

"I was telling the guy in there the kind of a dog we wanted the muzzle for," explained Bill, "and he remarked that there had been an advertisement in the paper offering ten dollars for a lost dog answering the same description. Ten dollars reward! And here you've been grumbling about spending a

measly sixty cents. Gol ding it, man, owning a dog is like operating a money wheel at a carnival in a hick town. Constant turnover, with money pouring in all the time. I tell you, we've been missing a good bet all these years that we've been drifting about the country. No wonder bank presidents invariably own dogs. Do you know what we're going to do after we collect the ten dollars reward offered for this dog?"

"Eat," I suggested hopefully.

"We're going to buy another dog," declared Bill solemnly. "With our profits from that one, we'll buy two; then three, and the first thing you know we'll have—"

"An animal act," I finished irritably.

Bill snorted angrily, and we trudged back to the Gisselbrecht place.

When we got there the dog was nowhere in sight. A piece of rope tied to the tree, its ragged end trailing on the ground, told the mute story. The dog had escaped.

A farmer came around the corner of the house. He was carrying a shotgun.

"Hey, mister, did you see a hound dog anywhere around here?" inquired Bill.

THE farmer glared at us angrily. The shotgun suddenly seemed menacing.

"Was that your dog?" he demanded. I didn't like the look in his eye. Neither did Bill, apparently.

"What—what dog?" countered Bill stalling for time and trying to hide the muzzle behind his back.

"That good-for-nothing hound that the dog warden caught and tied up in my yard here while he went off looking for the owner. You own him?" The question was dangerously like a challenge.

"I don't think so," said Bill feebly, playing safe.

"Well, I don't give a hoot who owns him," continued the farmer belligerently. "He got loose and killed seven of my best chickens. I caught him and locked him up in the chicken yard. Now I'm going to shoot him; and I'd like to get hold of the owner and shoot him too. Those chickens that mutt killed—"

"Come on, Bill," I urged. The irate farmer seemed altogether too anxious to lay down a barrage.

The more I was seeing of dogs as financial investments, the more I was convinced that something with a bit more steadiness was preferable—something like wildcat oil stock in a panicky market, for instance.

Bill, however, ignored my warning. He trailed along after the farmer as the latter headed in the direction of the chicken yard.

I waited for the sound of a shot, but none came. Finally Bill blew into sight again.

"Did he shoot it?" I inquired.

"No, I showed him the paper and he's going over with the dog and collect the reward to pay for his chickens," said Bill.

"And where do we get off?" I demanded bitterly.

"We're going to go into the dog market again," said Bill with irritating cheerfulness.

He ignored my groan of dismay.

"The farmer gave me twenty cents for the muzzle," he explained. "We'll use it to buy a couple of dogs—"

"Oh, no, we won't! Not if I—"

"The kind you put mustard on," Bill added reassuringly.

THE END.

The Men Who Make The Argosy

WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

Author of "Men of Iron," "Glory of Bildad," "By the Sword," etc.

I WAS born in 1884. That is as far as I can remember ordinarily, but in a good cider year I can sometimes remember the War of 1812 as plainly as though it were yesterday. I developed a bad case of writing at an early age—about eleven, I think. I wrote a three-act play. It was a fearful and wonderful thing. The villain held the mortgage on the farm, but the hero came home from the Civil War just in time to save the farm and the heroine. I wish I could remember some of the dialogue.

During the calf love period I went in for verse, which was worse than the attempt at drama. Then my literary activities were interrupted by a three-year period between high school and college. Even now I shudder when I think of some of the jobs I had. One was juggling barrels of apples and things, and bags of potatoes, from six in the morning until six at night. If I sat down to smoke I got what for.

But in a way they were interesting. I discovered relativity long before Mr. Einstein. I had a job loading sixty-pound tins of sausage in a packing plant; ten-hour day. In the morning I tossed them around like cigar boxes; at night each one weighed more than an elephant.

Working on a steamboat was fun, except that my bunk had other inhabitants. I solved that by sleeping on deck. In a misguided hour I learned shorthand and went to work indoors. I wrote millions and millions and millions of letters and wondered all the while why men would stay inside when they might be out under the sky.

Some inherited money made it possible for me to go to college when I was twenty-one. I immediately plunged into an orgy of philosophy and history and resolved to take a doctor's degree later and teach. I didn't have a chance, for the writing disease broke out again. I wrote verse, short stories, essays, and plays.

Here is one of the few times in my life when I showed sense—or maybe it was lack of sense. Anyhow, I settled down to the short story as my medium and I have been trying to learn something about it ever since. After college I had five years of newspaper work and then I began to free lance.

The first summer I made three dollars and fifty cents. I got so discouraged I grew chin whiskers, and they came out dark red. My hair is brown and it looked like a masquerade. When I went back from the country to the city policemen followed me; and when I stepped into my favorite barber shop in New York every barber stopped work. As one man they laughed. The barber who readjusted me didn't even ask whether I wanted to keep my whiskers—he went to work on them.

After I had pawned everything they would take I had to get a job. So I got a job as an editor. I worked long enough to get some eating money and free lanced again. Since that I have always managed to make a living writing short stories and novelettes.

At present I live under Coon Mountain, which is in the Adirondacks. My most valued possession is one first-class dog. He is a West Highland terrier and if he had size to go with his sand he could have licked the German army in '14. Before he got old he was a good woodchuck dog. One summer he brought home nineteen, just to show what he could do. Most of them were bigger than he is.

I like the sea and the mountains. I like to chop wood. I remember Scotch whisky and English ale and German beer and French wine with great regret. I think there has been a marked improvement in chorus girls in the past twenty years. The editor asked me to tell all about my likes and dislikes and experiences and I suppose I have to tell the truth.

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

THEODORE ROSCOE has been piling up the plaudits lately. A few of our readers say of him:

Beaver Dam, Wisc.

A story to challenge the popular imagination and one that is so vivid and fresh and real that it sets your brain afire with a sort of madness that won't let you eat or sleep or think until you've finished it from start to finish—is "The Death Watch," by Theodore Roscoe, in your May 3 issue. What a story to dream about but rarely to see in print! Congratulate Mr. Roscoe for creating a masterpiece that will live!

EMIL GOCKER.

San Antonio, Texas.

For the past thirteen years I have been a reader of your magazine ARGOSY. Personally I don't think anybody could buy a better book for the money or twice the price. I've always enjoyed your stories and appreciate the variation of them. Keep your book the way it is and everybody will be happy.

I have just finished Theodore Roscoe's "The Death Watch" and want to congratulate him on a very fine story. It's the best I've read in a long time. Here's hoping he writes a few more like it.

My only objection is that there isn't enough space between the covers. Keep the good work up.

D. L. WORLEY.

St. Louis, Mo.

I am inclosing ten coupons for my picture, and I hope it is one illustrating the adventures of that lovable old philosopher and fighter, *Thibaut Corday*. What a jewel of a character! I feel as if he were an old, old friend of mine, and I am tickled silly when I see a story of him by that brilliant Mr. Roscoe. And what stories! Each one is a gem in itself. There is an intangible, elusive something about each one—atmosphere, something that is the breath of Africa itself—you can feel it, sense it.

Forgive me for going off with such an outburst, but when any one mentions Theodore Roscoe I can't keep still. That is the type of story that I've always loved. Colorful, dreamy, tender—yes, even though they are woven about the roughest, fightenest, drinkenest bunch of scalawags in the world—you can't help but love 'em.

And next is Erle Stanley Gardner with his "Rain" and "Whispering Tales." In fact, I really like him better in these types of stories than I do his underworld stories, through which he first made himself famous. I have been a follower of his since the birth of "The Phantom Crook," and I think that with his deep insight into human nature he should dwell on the "dreamy—imaginative" type of story, which, alas, so few can write.

He and Roscoe are the two companions I go adventuring with most, via the printed page, and I am glad to see my old favorite ARGOSY keeps a good firm grip on them.

I am just turning twenty-one, and have read your magazine in Miami, El Paso, Mexico City, Juarez, New Orleans, Macon, Georgia, and practically every town that has a drug store, west of the Ozarks. One story I still remember, because of its trueness of locale and color, "Terrapin Tracks." I was with my grandmother in New Orleans at the time, and the dialect 'n' everything in the story seemed as if he, the author, had literally taken a piece of southern Louisiana and fashioned a story of it. It was great, and I remember every detail of it still.

I will close now, wishing your publication and your brilliant gang of writers all the luck this old world holds—for you are more than just another magazine—you are a friend, tried and true.

HAROLD LESTER BECCARD.

Pensacola, Fla.

I have been reading ARGOSY only for a short time, but I will continue reading it until "Gabriel blows his trumpet for me." All of your stories are enjoyable and a pleasure to read. Your impossible, Western, underworld, comical and adventure are all wholesome and interesting. I wasn't so keen on Western stories until J. E. Grinstead burst forth with his "In the Reign of King Ben," which is one of the most thrilling and human yarns I have read in a long time. But best of all are your Foreign Legion stories. The way that Theodore Roscoe unfurls his stories, the mysterious settings that surround them, make

my hair stand on edge. Keep ARGOSY just as it is and I am the same as being married to it.

DICK VALANZANO.

J. E. GRINSTEAD rang the bell with this reader also:

Greer, S. C.

I take this opportunity to thank Mr. J. E. Grinstead for his wonderful lifelike story of the range "The Reign of King Ben." I believe that it is the best of his many excellent stories, although "Square Conchas" was a close second. I am looking forward eagerly for some more of his stories. I look for another in ARGOSY soon. I have been reading the ARGOSY for five years, and can say that it is all right.

When may we hear from Mr. Wirt again? I like his stories very much and hope to hear from him again very soon.

J. C. HOWARD.

"THE Diamond Trail" was just about right for this fan:

Mendota, Ill.

Any time MacIsaac writes a story it goes to the head of the list, but when you put in a story like "The Diamond Trail," by George F. Worts, I have to make MacIsaac play second fiddle.

There is a real story—one that merits the pæans of praise it is sure to receive—modern, fast, intriguing, and real. Worts had already set himself a high standard with his *Gillian Hazeltine* stories, and now a new masterpiece! How does he do it?

Far better to have one story like that than to have volumes about Venus, atoms, or radio bugs.

Yours for more stories by Worts, MacIsaac, Seltzer, Thompson, Perry, and others that I can't recall right now. And thanks for "The Diamond Trail."

ARTHUR E. HOUSER.

ALTHOUGH published way back in 1924, "The Ship of Ishtar" is still vivid in this reader's memory. We still have a few more copies of the story in book form which you may have at one dollar if you care to have one:

Independence, Mo.

May heartfelt appreciation be expressed to ARGOSY? Then accept this for a single reason—your bringing to all of us A. Merritt's "The Ship of Ishtar."

This hypergenius of a unique literary style wove into "The Ship" a romantic prose poem not soon to be forgotten. Here is vitalized, in a most extraordinary manner, the aspirations of a Goethe, the fulfillment of the visions of a second Poe, the dreams of a later Dante. It is one of the few perfect lyrics, both in theme and phraseology, of all earth literature. It is a priceless heritage to American culture.

It combines a profound knowledge of modern psychic and scientific research with classic beauty and the immutable primary characteristics of humanity. It is like "The Ship" of which it tells—a perfectly defined conflict between the forces of good and evil as they are so clearly real to the soul of the romanticist.

Merritt is not a prose poet simply. His artistry is peerless and epic. It is deserving of the highest recognition.

WALLACE PALMER.

AUTHENTIC and vivid historical stories always find an enthusiastic welcome in ARGOSY—and we have some splendid ones scheduled:

Chicago, Ill.

I have read with the greatest enjoyment the story "Mad Anthony's Legion," by F. V. W. Mason, in the May 17 issue. This vivid, colorful historic story has made your publication the only one of nine received this month—of value to us.

Shall purchase your magazine at the newsstands for the next few weeks—and if this story is a true indication of your editorial policy, shall see that our subscription and that of several other persons reaches you—for we are looking for a magazine that publishes just such stories as this one.

MRS. CHARLES WENDELL HOLMES,
President National Patriotic Association.

NOW for a few favorite authors:

New York, N. Y.

I would like to say here that I have enjoyed ARGOSY for about five years, and taking everything into consideration in that time, I like the stories of W. Wirt best, closely followed by MacIsaac, Bedford-Jones, Seltzer and Worts.

W. J. RODENBACH.

ALONG comes a good word for our covers:

Columbus, Ohio.

As a practically new reader of ARGOSY and a very enthusiastic one, perhaps you will permit me a little space.

Reading Joe H. Hoffman's letter in May 3 number of ARGOSY I noticed that he sorted this magazine in a different class from the other action magazines. I have always felt that way. To explain, I can remember when but a tiny tot I tore the covers off my dad's magazines and foremost among them in my memory is ARGOSY. I have read it off and on for my twenty-four years of existence just from the start I got in my baby days tearing off the covers.

It was a cover which recently made me a reader again—the cover for "Alexander the Red." I read everything in that issue and haven't missed a copy since and don't intend to miss one as long as it keeps up to its present standard of good action stories at a low price.

WESLEY S. BIRD.

"ALEXANDER the Red" continues to bring in the letters:

Elkhart, Ind.

The best story of the lot was "Alexander the Red," by Don McGrew, in the April 5 issue. Let's have more stories of Rome—and why not a few of ancient Persia?

JEROME K. BURKE.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1_____

2_____

3_____

4_____

5_____

*Name*_____

*Street*_____

*City*_____ *State*_____

6-21

Looking Ahead!

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gives us the queer tale of Madame Storey's most unusual case, wherein a gay ball was plunged into tragedy and weirdly fantastic creatures played new and amazing rôles. The curious story is one of the author's most absorbing and exciting complete novelettes—

The Butlers' Ball

ROBERT E. PINKERTON

will be back with us again also, this time with a two-part story of the British Columbia logging country, a tale of mystery and adventure—

The Ghost of Locked Inlet

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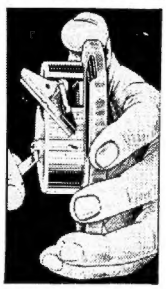

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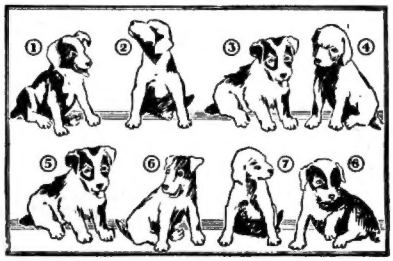
295 Madison Ave., New York, N. Y.

$2 COMPLETE

Win a Nash Sedan or $2750.00 in CASH

Someone who answers this ad will receive, absolutely free, a fully equipped 7-passenger, Advanced Six Nash Sedan or its full value in cash ($2,000.00) and $750.00 in cash for promptness. We are also giving away a Dodge Sedan, a Brunswick Phonograph and many other valuable prizes—besides Hundreds of Dollars in Cash for advertising purposes to men, women and children who solve our puzzle and win our prizes. Over $100,000 in Cash and Prizes already given! Mrs. Kate L. Needham won $3,150.00; W. R. Eddington, $3,050.00; Mrs. M. Iverson, $2,230.00. This offer is guaranteed by a big reliable company with a reputation of many years of honest dealings, and is open to anyone living in the U. S. A. outside of Chicago.



Find the Twin Puppies

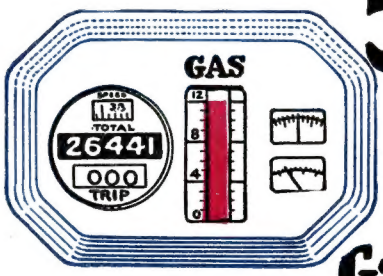
There are eight puppies in the picture. Two and only two are alike. See if you can find them. The rest are different either in their spots or in their ears. When you find the twins, write their numbers on a sheet of paper or postcard and send it to me right away with your name and address written plainly.

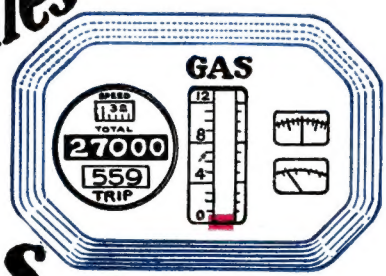
$750.00 Extra for Promptness

In addition to the many valuable prizes and Hundreds of Dollars in Cash, we are also giving a Special Added Prize of $750.00 Cash for Promptness to the winner of the Nash Sedan—making a total of $2,750.00 in prizes or cash that you may win. In case of ties duplicate prizes will be awarded each one tying. Solve the puzzle and send me your answer right away to qualify for an opportunity to share in the $4,500.00 total Grand Prizes. EVERYBODY PROFITS. You may be the lucky first prize winner. It pays to be prompt.

JOHN T. ADAMS, Manager, Dept. A-283, 323 South Peoria Street, Chicago, Illinois

Over the Mountains from Los Angeles 559 Miles on 11 Gallons of GAS





Think of it! FIVE HUNDRED FIFTY-NINE MILES over rough mountainous country burning only ELEVEN GALLONS OF GASOLINE. Imagine more than FIFTY MILES to the GALLON. That is what the WHIRLWIND CARBURETING DEVICE does for D. R. Gilbert, enough of a saving on just one trip to more than pay the cost of the Whirlwind.

THE WHIRLWIND SAVES MOTORISTS MILLIONS OF DOLLARS YEARLY

Whirlwind users, reporting the results of their tests, are amazed at the results they are getting. Letters keep streaming into the office telling of mileages all the way from 22 to 59 miles on a gallon, resulting in a saving of from 25% to 50% in gas bills alone.

Mark H. Estes writes: "I was making 17 miles to the gallon on my Pontiac Coupe. Today, with the Whirlwind, I am making 35 5-10 miles to the gallon. Am I glad I put it on? I'll say so!"

P. P. Goerzen writes: "I made an actual test both with and without a Whirlwind, getting 13½ miles without and 34 6-10 miles with the Whirlwind, or a gain of 21 miles to the gallon. The longer the Whirlwind is in use on the machine the better the engine runs, has more pep and quicker starting. It makes a new engine out of an old one, and starts at the touch of the starter button."

R. J. Tulp: "The Whirlwind increased the mileage on our Ford truck from 12 to 26 miles to gallon and 25% in speed. We placed another on a Willys-Knight and increased from 12 to 17 miles per gallon."

Arthur Grant: "I have an Oakland touring car that has been giving me 15 miles to the gallon average, but I can see a great difference with the Whirlwind, as it climbs the big hills on high and gives me better than 23 miles to the gallon of gas, which is better than 50% saving in gas."

W. A. Scott: "I had my Whirlwind for three years. Winter and summer it gives the same perfect service, instant starting, smoother running, and what I have saved in gasoline these last few years has brought other luxuries which I could not have afforded previously."

Car owners all over the world are saving money every day with the Whirlwind, besides having better operating motors. Think what this means on your own car. Figure up your savings—enough for a radio—a bank account—added pleasures. Why let the Oil Companies profit by your waste? Find out about this amazing little device that will pay for itself every few weeks in gas saving alone.

FITS ALL CARS

In just a few minutes the Whirlwind can be installed on any make of car, truck or tractor. It's actually less work than changing your oil or putting water in the battery. No drilling, tapping or changes of any kind necessary. It is guaranteed to work perfectly on any make of car, truck or tractor, large or small, new model or old model. The more you drive the more you will save.

SALESMEN AND DISTRIBUTORS WANTED

To Make Up to $100.00 a Week and More

Whirlwind men are making big profits supplying this fast-selling device that car owners can not afford to be without. Good territory is still open. Free sample offer to our workers. Full particulars sent on request. Just check the coupon.

WHIRLWIND MANUFACTURING CO.

999 291-A Third Street Milwaukee, Wis.

GUARANTEE

No matter what kind of a car you have—no matter how big a gas eater it is—the Whirlwind will save you money. We absolutely guarantee that the Whirlwind will more than save its cost in gasoline alone within thirty days, or the trial will cost you nothing. We invite you to test it at our risk and expense. You are to be the sole judge.

FREE OFFER COUPON

WHIRLWIND MANUFACTURING CO.
999 291-A Third Street, Milwaukee, Wis.

Gentlemen: You may send me full particulars of your Whirlwind Carbureting device and tell me how I can get one Free. This does not obligate me in any way whatever.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....

County..... State.....

[ ] Check here if you are interested in full or part time salesmen position.